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THE WEST HAM DISAPPEARANCES
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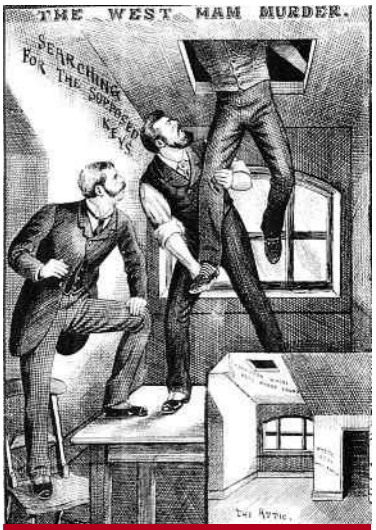

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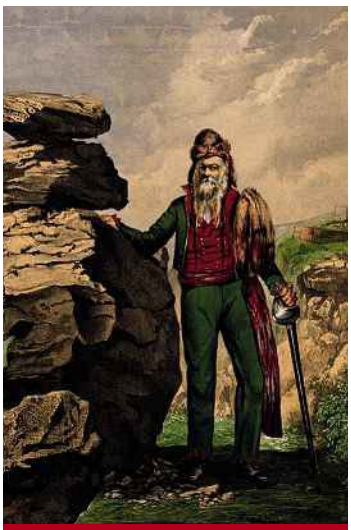

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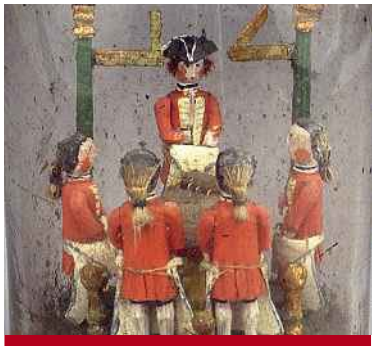

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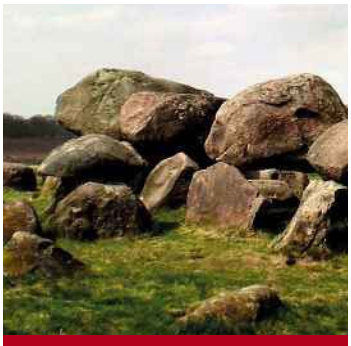

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COVER: TIM FLACH / GETTY IMAGES

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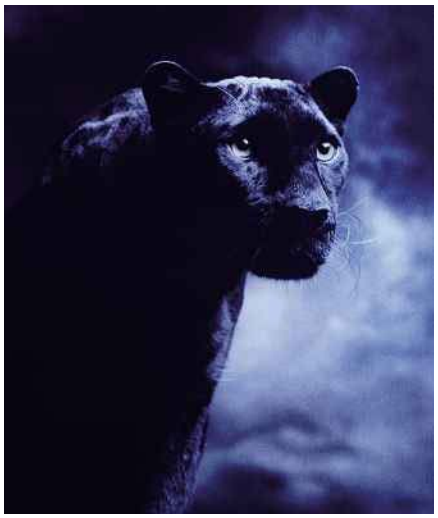
editorial

Who let the cats out?

PAWS FOR THOUGHT

There are times when it's hard to get a handle on an ongoing phenomenon, strange or not. Whenever an increase in, say, hate crime or sexual assault is reported, questions are asked. Do such increases reflect a greater incidence of the crimes in question, a greater willingness of victims to come forward, a more comprehensive approach to logging and reporting data, or possibly all three? We appear to be facing a similar problem in tracking the appearances of ABCs (alien big cats, or out-of-place felids) in Britain. There seems little doubt that our own files for the past five years reveal as broad a spread of sightings as ever, but far fewer of them than in previous years – certainly since our last major round-ups; but what this tells us is hard to say. Are there fewer mystery moggies out there? Have people become reluctant to report their encounters, or perhaps so used to them that they feel it's hardly worth the bother? Have local and national newspapers tired of the subject and moved on to other weird topics, leaving ABCs languishing with crop circles and alien abductions as yesterday's news?



Whatever the answer, once we'd decided to focus on the subject in this issue it was inevitable that, in typically synchronous fashion, big cats would leap back into the headlines. The saga of Flaviu, Dartmoor Zoo's lynx on the loose, concluded just as we were going to press, and with a happy ending. The feline escape artist, having led keepers and police (equipped with helicopters and drones) a merry dance of 24 days, was finally recaptured on 30 July when he walked into a baited trap set by tracker Andrew Goatman in woodland close to the zoo. Flaviu was described as "grumpy" following his return to captivity, but staff were relieved that he was now safe. (*D.Mail, 31 July 2016*)

Within days, Devon and Cornwall Police were experiencing an even bigger cat flap when a lorry driver reported seeing a "lion" in a clay pit between Nanpean and Whitemoor in St Austell, Cornwall. Large paw prints were found at the scene, where the animal had crossed the road. A police spokesperson said: "It was described as a female lion walking in front of a lorry… There have been reports of a similar nature over the years". While the officers didn't see the creature, fears of a lioness on the loose increased the following day when another lorry driver claimed to have discovered a headless deer less than a mile away. Brian Goldsworthy, who found the remains early that morning in the quarry where he works, said: "We found the body of a headless baby deer in the quarry. I know a few people are taking it quite lightly, but it is a serious matter – when you start finding headless animals, then things get a little bit serious." (*D.Telegraph, 3+4 Aug 2016*) The past week has also seen reports of a family of escaped ostriches (or rheas) in Ayrshire and an errant emu in Suffolk: more on those in a future issue.

ERRATA

FT342:60:
Jerome Clark turned in a very positive review of *Neanderthal* by Bernard Heuvelmans, published by Anomalist Books, and many readers – not to mention Jerry Clark himself – were puzzled by the lacklustre rating of 6/10 and seemingly irrelevant verdict ("One for the ancient alien believers and scoffers alike") that appeared at the end of the review. The solution to this enigma was a leftover 'FT verdict' from the previous issue, referring to *The Annunaki Chronicles: A Zechariah Sitchin Reader*; we had forgotten to replace it with Jerry's real verdict: "An eye-opening look at an odd controversy so far unresolved", 8/10.

FT170:78–FT342:78:
And finally, thanks to Dan Rose, the first (and only) person to spot our longest-running mistake – an incorrect web address on the reader info page (www.forteantimes.co.uk rather than .com) that made its first appearance in FT170 (May 2003) and was finally corrected in FT343 (Aug 2016) after running for 13 years and 173 consecutive issues – could this be a world record for the longest-running cock-up in a magazine?

DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
SEE PAGE 78

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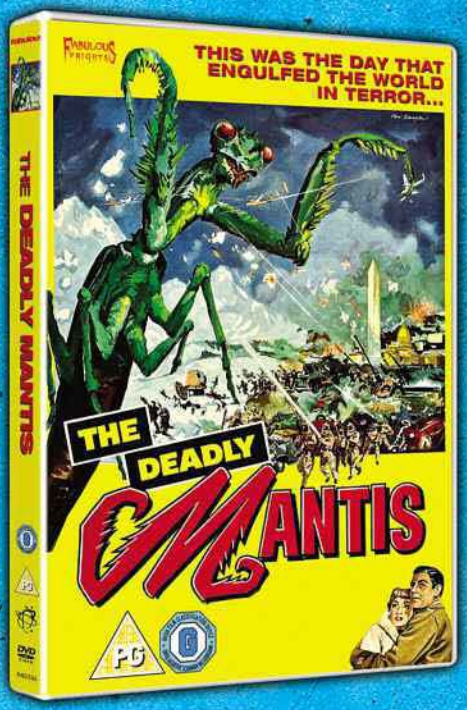
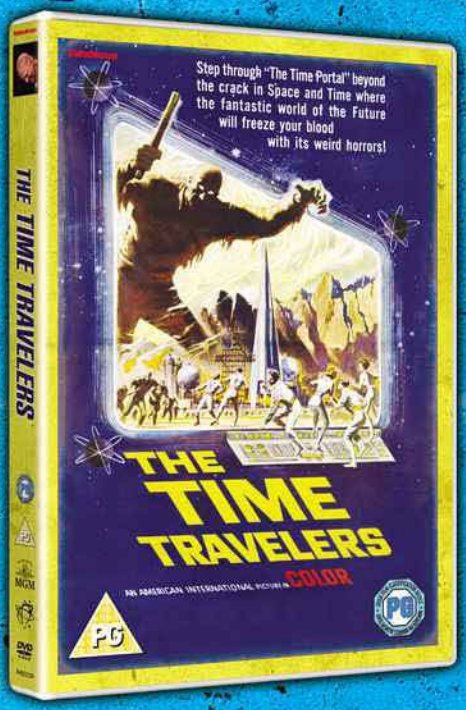
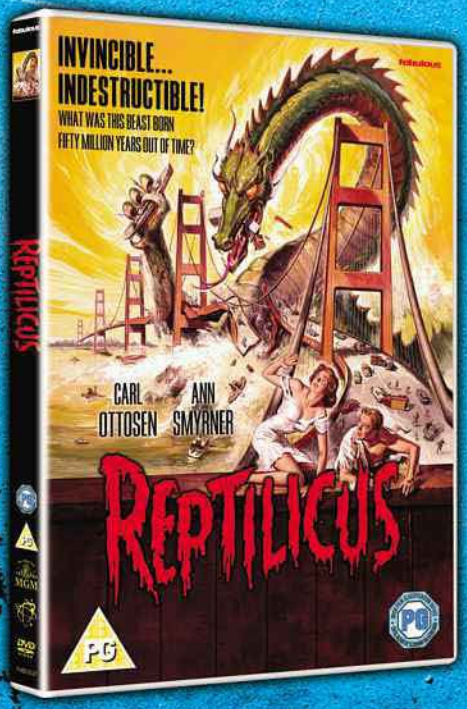
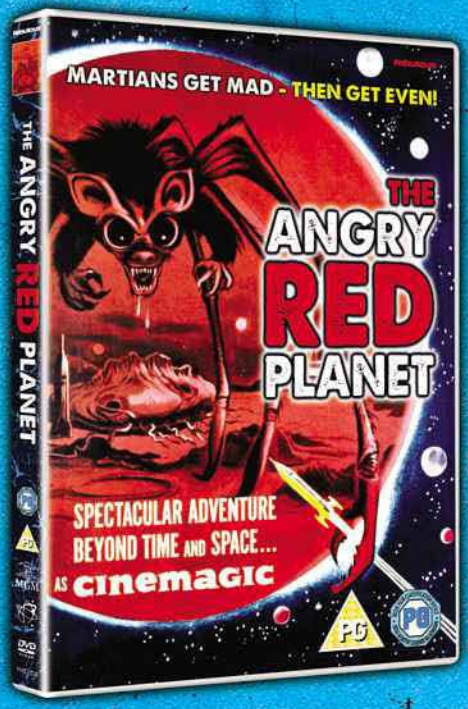



Step through "The Time Portal" beyond the crack in Space and Time where the fantastic world of the Future will freeze your blood with its weird horrors!
THE TIME TRAVELERS
THE TIME TRAVELERS




MARTIANS GET MAD - THEN GET EVEN!
THE ANGRY RED PLANET
SPECTACULAR ADVENTURE BEYOND TIME AND SPACE... AS CINEMAGIC
THE ANGRY RED PLANET

strangedays

Lure of the commonplace

Chinese tourists continue to descend on an ordinary Oxfordshire village

Why do busloads of Chinese tourists keep turning up to photograph a couple of streets of modern, suburban houses in Kidlington, about five miles (8km) north of Oxford? It is said to be "the largest village in Europe" (pop: 13,700) – though the local council claims only that it is the second largest in England. It also once enjoyed a walk-on part in an episode of *Inspector Morse* called "The Last Bus To Woodstock", but this fails to explain its attraction. There are much prettier sights within a short drive: the honey-coloured hamlets of the Cotswolds, Blenheim Palace (built by Kidlington resident Sir John Vanbrugh) and, of course, the city of Oxford itself. Yet roughly every Thursday this summer, groups of up to 40 Chinese tourists appeared here with their cameras. Ignoring the 12th-century church and the River Cherwell meandering through a local meadow, they head for a row of semi-detached houses in Benmead Road and The Moors, where they take selfies in front of garage doors and parked cars, or queue up to photograph a hanging basket.

Maurice Billington, 62, first became aware that something odd was happening on 26 May, when a local resident called him to say people were looking through her windows. Reports quickly followed of groups of strangers wandering in and out of front gardens taking photographs. There was nothing menacing or furtive about them. James Holland, 73, popped out to put some garden clippings in his dustbin and found several Chinese posing under his porch. "As soon as I appeared," he said, "a load more came running down the road to take my photo." Mr Billington was amazed to find a man posing with a wheelie bin for a photo. "They very often turn up on bin collection day, but this man was actually hugging a bin," he said. He gestured to a row of satellite television trucks stretching right down the road, all of them waiting for the next coachload of mystery tourists.

"They don't speak English and they don't have a guide"

No one knew who was organising these trips. "They don't speak English and they don't have a guide," said Mr Holland. "They come in a white coach with no writing on the side, and the driver says he is Polish and can't understand English either." Despite some reports that the tourists may be from Japan or Korea, Mr Holland said he had lived in China for two years and was certain they were Chinese. Many think they are on their way to or from Bicester Village, the discount shopping outlet for big fashion names nine miles (14km) away – but why go via this particular housing estate?

Are residents flattered or alarmed? The most common response is 'bemused'. Jialing Luo, a Chinese social anthropologist based at St Hugh's College, Oxford, suspects her compatriots are fascinated by the apparent affluence of ordinary England. "In China, semi-detached houses are only for the very rich and usually in gated communities," she said. "Here, they are on the road. And when a garden is open, they think it must be public. It's probably their first time in the UK and they do not understand how it works. But it is safe and friendly here. If they did this in the United States, they might get shot."

A *Daily Telegraph* columnist commented (8 July 2016): "How would I react if a middle-aged Chinese couple with a long lens peered in my front window? I like to think I might obligingly perform some sort of traditional British activity such as lacemaking, butter churning or perhaps eating my supper in front of *The One Show*."

FT correspondent Rob Gandy comments: "Oriental worldviews can be very different to those of us Anglo-Saxons. A few years ago my wife and I visited Stonehenge. A couple of Japanese tourists asked my wife to take a photo of them with their camera, which she naturally agreed to do. She was very surprised when they asked her to photograph them with just Salisbury Plain behind them, rather than the stones of Stonehenge. When they saw that she was puzzled they explained that because there is so little 'open space' in Japan, they wanted to be photographed with a big expanse of open land behind them." *BBC News, 6 July; D.Telegraph, Eve. Standard, 7 July; dailymail.co.uk, 8 July 2016.*

TONY BENNELL / SWNS.COM

ABOVE: A baffled resident of Kidlington encounters a group of Chinese tourists.

PARROT FASHION
Bud the African grey provides evidence in murder case
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PABLO'S HIPPOS
Why a Colombian drug lord's pet pachyderms now roam free
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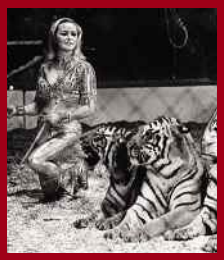


PUSSIES ON THE PROWL
An update on Britain's out-of-place big cat mystery
PAGE 20

The Conspirasphere

Is the Internet amplifying our inner fears into shared externalised 'realities'? Forget the 'Mandela Effect' – NOEL ROONEY proposes that the 'Spinoza Paradox' is in operation...

Two – apparently disparate – memes gaining considerable online traction have got me thinking.

Gangstalking is a phenomenon where a person comes to believe that they are being followed by a dedicated group of stalkers (see **FT305:40-47**); surveillance is 24/7 and can include a Kafkaesque form of burglary, where an intruder breaks in and rearranges the victim's belongings but doesn't take anything. Work or student colleagues are often part of the plot; collective bullying or ostracism can drive the victim to relocate, only to find that their erstwhile colleagues have got in touch with the new people and persuaded them to continue the persecution.

If one individual were to describe this experience (to a psychiatrist, say) there is little doubt that they would be regarded (and perhaps treated, in the medical sense) as suffering from some form of paranoid delusion. But if that individual searches the Web and discovers other people suffering the same experience, something rather different happens. The numbers of people sharing their gangstalking experiences online is now so considerable that, if we give them full credence, then a good proportion of the people reading this article must be involved in one of the stalking teams.

The Mandela Effect is a rabbit hole (a veritable warren in fact) of memory dislocation. Its name comes from the shared reports of people who have a distinct memory of the famous African freedom fighter having died in the 1980s rather than 2013. Again, it's not the fact that one person has had this apparent delusion that makes the phenomenon; after all, that would be nothing more sinister than selective memory bumping against cognitive dissonance – momentarily alarming, perhaps, but ultimately just amusing.

Many of the conventional instances of the Mandela Effect are weirdly mundane: the incorrect spelling of 'definitely' as 'definately' (always the same misspelling, obviously, or it wouldn't be worth reporting); the names of certain celebrities, TV shows, or commercial products being misremembered in the same way by a large number of people.

The proposed explanations are anything but conventional. Some see this as an encounter with an alternative universe, or evidence that an alternative universe is in the process of taking over our own. Others have suggested that the type of mind control programme most famously embodied in MK Ultra is still being practised, and on an increasingly large scale (though why The Powers That Be would get hung up on the spelling of 'definitely' is a line of speculation I will leave to the purists).

WALTER DHLADHLA / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

What clearly links these memes is the collective power offered by the Internet: internal fears and delusions, once shared with a sufficiently large peer group, can be externalised and reified, and agency can be ascribed; thus the erstwhile delusion or dissonance is now something that someone out there is doing to us (and that 'us' is part of the affirmation, the objective evidence). Alien abduction is probably the first historical instance of this phenomenon: the metamorphosis of sleep paralysis into a vast intergalactic conspiracy.

I suspect we will be seeing a lot more of this eldritch online confirmation conspiracy, so I propose to give it a name: the Spinoza Paradox. Spinoza said that if you hold a fear or emotion up to the light, it ceases to be scary; but if you hold a personal fear up to the blue light of the Internet, something much stranger may happen.

http://mandelaeffect.com/major-memories/
http://allnewspipeline.com/Mandela_Effect_Devils_Virtual_Mental_Playground.php
https://gangstalking.wordpress.com/faq/
https://fightgangstalking.com/what-is-gang-stalking/

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

A new weapon in the fight against undercover cuckoos

Cambridge News, 15 June 2015.

Bats talk at wildlife centre

Wolverhampton Express & Star, 9 June 2015.

'Drunk' squirrel causes hundreds of pounds of damage

BBC News, 16 July 2016.

Woman in street hurt by flying horse

D.Telegraph, 22 June 2015.

Warning: aggressive walking fish heading to Australia

D.Telegraph, 3 June 2015.

Tortured Fish Slave Returns Home After 22 Years

Associated Press, 30 June 2015.

Girl knocked out by fish

Liverpool Echo, 5 June 2015.

Chalking the Horse

The White Horse at Uffington in Oxfordshire is the oldest confirmed chalk figure in Britain, having been dated to the late Bronze Age, 1,000-700 BC. To keep the horse white, the National Trust invites local residents and visitors every year to help re-chalk the 3,000 year-old landmark. The re-chalking of the horse is an ancient tradition, but was banned in 1857 after 30,000 visitors and travellers turned up to White Horse Hill, many of whom were reluctant to move on. These days, the National Trust's rangers provide instruction and equipment, and enthusiasts are booked into half-hour slots to take a turn at pounding the new chalk into place. Volunteers use mallets to beat small pieces of chalk-rubble into the surface of the hill figure to keep it smooth and bright. The horse was re-chalked over the weekend of 2 and 3 July 2016. Usually the horse is re-chalked twice a year but last year's events were cancelled due to heavy rain. The next chalking event will be held on August Bank Holiday weekend.

In 2005, a veterinarian suggested the Uffington White Horse was really a dog, and should be renamed "the Wolfhound of Uffington" [**FT271:18**]. A previous suggestion is that it resembles a cat, perhaps an ancestor of the country's ABCs. Others have seen it as a dragon; the flat-topped hill in the valley just below is called Dragon Hill.

PHOTO: THE NATIONAL TRUST

SIDELINES...

CIRCULAR ADVICE

In an interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the Oscar-winning actor Mark Rylance said he and Prince Charles had corresponded regarding crop glyph phenomena. The actor said: "He's interested in crop circles, so I send him my crop circle calendars and magazines that I buy and I keep him informed. I'm his crop circle counsellor." *D.Telegraph, 21 June 2016.*

I'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU

In 1990, a 15-year-old student from Argoed High School in Flintshire, Wales, sat his GCSE examinations. His name was Bond... James Bond, his paper reference number was 007, and the exam invigilator was a Mr Goldfinger. *Charles Saatchi, writing in the (London) Evening Standard, 16 June 2016.*

SLOW-MOVING HAZARD

A German driver lost control of his car after slipping on a slimy trail left by a procession of snails making their way across the A33 Autobahn near Paderborn, about 220 miles (350km) west of Berlin. The car – a vintage East German Trabant – flipped over and was wrecked, but the young driver was unhurt. *The Local (Germany), Toronto Sun, 29 June 2016.*

CAT SHOOTS OWNER

Joseph Stanton, 29, was cooking in his kitchen in Bates Township, Michigan, on 8 March when he was shot in the "lower torso" by one of his cats. The pet had knocked his 9mm handgun onto the floor, discharging the weapon. *[AP] 10 Mar 2016.*

MARTIN ROSS

Remarkable children

Pakistan's 'solar kids' and America's telepathic savant

METIN AKTAS / ANADOLU AGENCY / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Abdul Rasheed and his brother Shoaib Ahmed appear unable to move or talk after the sun goes down.

THE 'SOLAR KIDS'

Doctors in Pakistan are mystified by the case of two brothers who have come to be known as the "solar kids". Aged nine and 13, the boys are normal, active children during the day; but once the sun goes down, Abdul Rasheed and his brother Shoaib Ahmed lapse into a vegetative state, unable to move or talk. Javed Akram, a professor of medicine at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences, has no idea what is causing the symptoms. "We took this case as a challenge," he said. "Our doctors are doing medical tests to determine why these kids remain active in the day but cannot open their eyes, why they cannot talk or eat when the sun goes down."

The government is providing free medical care to the brothers, who come from an impoverished family. Samples of their blood have been sent to overseas specialists, and researchers are collecting soil and air samples from the family's home village. Mohammad Hashim, the boys' father, comes from a village near Quetta in Baluchistan province. He and his wife are first cousins and two of their six children died at an early age. Their other two children have not displayed any unusual symptoms. He put forward a simple theory: "I think my sons get energy from the sun." However, doctors have already dismissed the idea that sunlight plays a role, noting that the boys can move during the day even when kept in a dark room or during a rainstorm. *Irish Examiner, 7 May 2016.*

They lapse into a vegetative state, unable to move or talk

SAVANT AGED FIVE

Ramses Sanguino, a five-year-old savant who is learning seven languages (including Japanese and Russian) and solving complex mathematical equations, has been filmed seemingly demonstrating telepathy at his home in Los Angeles. In the footage, the youngster, who has a 'high functioning' form of autism, correctly recounts the value and suits of playing cards, as well as numbers that were reportedly penned out of sight. His mother, Nyx Sanguino, 32, later posted the videos on the Internet, where they caught the eye of neuroscientist Dr Diane Powell, a former faculty member at Harvard Medical School who currently runs a private practice in Medford, Oregon.

Dr Powell is now studying Ramses as part a cutting-edge research project. She believes that telepathy may represent an alternative method of

communication between autistic children and their parents, who "desperately want to communicate with one another, but can't". She said: "I have found many autistic children who have been reported to be telepathic," and claims to have already seen signs of telepathy in seven people. "I have met many people who have said they would never publicly state that they believe in telepathy but tell me that they have actually experienced it or witnessed it themselves," she said. "Many of them say the reason they don't come forward and say anything is that they are actually afraid that they would be ridiculed or possibly even lose their job."

At the time of the report last November, Ramses had apparently been able to demonstrate a degree of telepathy with Dr Powell during three meetings. She used a random-number generator to pick numbers for Ms Sanguino to write down and think about, before asking Ramses to try and read his mother's mind to guess them – which he did successfully. Ms Sanguino said her son had been able to recite 38 numbers written

"Many autistic children are reported to be telepathic"

out of sight. In another test with Dr Powell, he was able to correctly guess 16 out of 17 numbers hidden out of sight – including one double-digit number.

Ms Sanguino, who works as an artist, is homeschooling her son after he kept correcting his teacher. "Even when he was a baby he didn't like toys, he just liked reading," she said. "He started reading when he was 12 months old and could even say words in English, Spanish, Greek and some Japanese. When he was 18 months old he knew all the multiplication tables in English and Spanish and had learned the periodic table and all the atomic numbers. I taught him some of the languages, but I have no idea how he learned parts of Hindi, Arabic or Hebrew by the time he was three. It may have been through the house computer that is often left on.

"I put him into a school but it was a nightmare. He was the only child who could read in the class. The teacher liked him at first and called him the little professor, but soon he started correcting some of her spelling and maths and she began isolating him from other students. I had to take him out of the school and back home with me. He was too far ahead to learn anything there. He is different and people cannot understand the way he thinks. He is obsessed with numbers and will count everything, houses, books, letters, and he won't move on until he has counted them all. He asks maths questions to the little kids he plays with and sometimes it is hard for him to make friends. I worry that he might end up lonely. He is so smart that sometimes he scares me. I really want him to have the best education in the world and be happy."

Dr Powell hopes to get Ramses sponsored into a special school for gifted autistic children. She said he was "one of the top five savants in the world." *dailymail.co.uk, 5 Nov 2015.*

RUARIDH CONNELLAN / BARCROFT USA

ABOVE: Five-year-old Ramses Sanguino has a 'high functioning' form of autism and reportedly displays telepathic abilities.

SIDELINES...

BIG ONION VOTE

In a Romanian town, Vasile Cepoi defeated Vasile Cepoi and Vasile Cepoi by 1,100 votes in a mayoral election. The three men are not related. Said the victor: "I added my middle name, and ran as Vasile Lica Cepoi." He was also the incumbent, who secured his fourth term as mayor of Draguseni (pop: 2,500). Both names are common in Romania; Cepoi means "big onions". *[AP] 7 June 2016.*

WICKED PENSIONERS

A group of 31 bridge players in the Thai resort town of Pattaya, ranging in age from 50 to 84 and including British, Swedish, and Australian citizens, were arrested on 3 February during an anti-gambling raid. They were not playing for money, but had contravened the Playing Cards Act (1935), which prohibits individuals from possessing more than 120 playing cards. They were released on bail after 12 hours in custody. *BBC News, 4 Feb; D.Telegraph, 5 Feb 2016.*

KNOTWEED JAM

Knotweed, the Japanese plant that damages buildings and costs a fortune to eradicate, could have a future as a dessert. Cllr John Joe Culloty of Kerry County Council in Ireland said knotweed shoots taste "like rhubarb" and make an appetising jam. Top chef Damien Grey has combined the plant with duck and redcurrants at his Heron and Grey restaurant in Blackrock, Co Dublin. *irishtimes.com, 21 June 2016.*

WORLD ENDING (AGAIN)

On 28 April, Alex Brizzi (25) from Elkridge, Maryland, walked into a Baltimore TV station wearing an animal costume – panda or hedgehog (accounts differ) – and strapped to a fake bomb. He was shot and wounded by police. His father said Alex had had a vision from God in mid-April that the world would end on 3 June, and suggested he was trying to warn the world about imminent Armageddon. The 'bomb' was chocolate bars wrapped in aluminium, duct-taped to a flotation device. *[AP] 29 April 2016.*

SIDELINES...

RARA AVIS

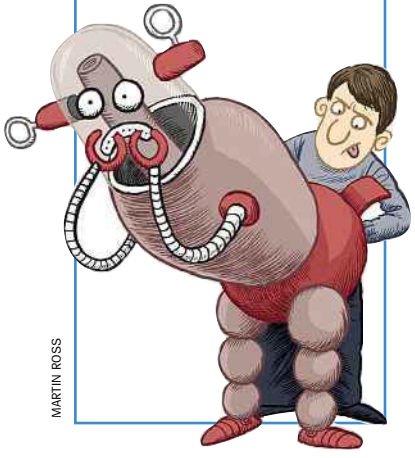
A Dalmatian pelican, one of the world's largest birds, has been spotted in the UK for the first time since it was hunted to extinction 5,000 years ago. On 7 May it was seen at Gwithian in Cornwall and subsequently in St Ives and near Land's End. The red-billed bird with an 11ft (3m) wingspan is thought to have been carried here from Europe by the hot weather. *Mail on Sunday, 15 May 2016*.

GRANDEST CANYON

The world's biggest canyon may have been found in Princess Elizabeth Land, East Antarctica, by means of satellite imagery. It is 620 miles (1,000km) long – over twice the length of the Grand Canyon in the US – and is thought to be over half a mile (800m) deep in places. It is not known if it formed before or after the ice sheet grew on top. *Times, D.Mail, 14 Jan 2016.*

GETTING TO THE BOTTOM

The job of the only man whose rectum is used to teach rectal examinations to medical students could be at risk after the development of a realistic robotic bottom. The 'robottom' can mimic different-sized prostates with different textures and consistency. Rectal exams are difficult to teach because neither teacher not student can see what the other is doing. *Times, 5 July 2016*.



MARTIN ROSS

KILLER TWISTS

DEATH ON THE CARDS, EVIDENCE PARROT-FASHION AND KILLER POSSESSED BY UBER APP

BRIGHTON ARGUS / SOLENT NEWS & PHOTO AGENCY

ABOVE: Brighton Tarot reader Jayne Braiden. **BELOW**: Star Randel-Hanson confessed to the murder of Derick Marnay.

TAROT CONFESSION

A murderer confessed to a tarot reader when he drew a series of cards that appeared to reveal his crime. Jayne Braiden kept Star Randel-Hanson talking in her seafront shop on 4 May 2015 until police arrived. Officers then went to the murderer's flat in Vernon Terrace, Brighton, and found the body of his housemate slumped against a radiator in the kitchen. Randel-Hanson had stabbed Derick Marney, 70, and left his body for 10 days before walking into JJ Tarot in Brighton to ask for a double psychic reading. "I could sense he was a bit tense when he came in," said Miss Braiden, 56. "The first [card] was The Blasted Tower, which means falling out with someone, a really serious row. Then there was The Emperor, the dominant male. Then The Devil card means obviously something awful. He began sobbing and I said to him, 'Look, I can see here that this is not good, you need to tell me everything, let's talk.' He said, 'It's terrible, I killed him.' He told me that he killed him

"The Blasted Tower card means a really serious row"

SUSSEX POLICE

but he did not mean to and it was awful." Among the other cards he selected were Death and Justice. Miss Braiden told him she would have to call the police and asked if he minded. She then stepped out of her shop to dial 999 – but was surprised when the call handler downgraded the call to a non-emergency, suspecting it was a hoax. As a result, police took an hour to turn up. Miss Braden didn't feel threatened by the murderer and regarded it as her "duty" to keep him there until police arrived. While waiting, Randel-Hanson described his relationship with Marney (who was a spiritual medium) and other parts of his life, and together they laughed at the time the police were taking. Randel-Hanson, 56, had met Marney at the Brotherhood Gate spiritualist church in Brighton in 2013 and they moved in together and shared a bed, but were not a couple or lovers. Randal-Hanson claimed that Marney had made unwelcome sexual advances and sexually abused him on three occasions. On 26 May 2016 Randel-Hanson was jailed for life with a minimum of 15 years. *Brighton Argus, 26 May; D.Mail, 27+30 May; D.Telegraph, Sun, 27 May 2016.*

ABOVE: Did Bud the African grey re-enact the murder he witnessed?

PARROT SEES ALL

A murder case in Michigan took a bizarre turn when the victim's family suggested his pet parrot might have been an eyewitness to the crime and was able to recount what he had seen and heard. Murder victim Martin Duram's family believes Bud, an African grey parrot, has been re-enacting a chilling exchange that occurred just before Duram was fatally shot in his Ensley Township home in May 2015. Bud is now being cared for by Mr Durham's former wife, Christina Keller. "That bird picks up everything and anything, and it's got the filthiest mouth around," said Lillian Duram, the victim's mother. The family says a video recorded weeks after the murder shows Bud re-enacting an argument between Mr Duram and his wife that they believe led to the shooting. In the video, the bird alternates between high- and low-pitched voices. In the final exchange, the man's voice says: "Get out." Woman's voice: "Where will I go?" Man's voice: "Don't fucking shoot!" Ms Keller was certain it was "Marti's voice".

The 45-year-old Martin Duram was found dead in the apartment, having been shot five times. His wife Glenna, 46, was found with a shotgun wound to the head, which she survived. Because of the bird's repeated re-enactments, the victim's parents said they believe Glenna killed their son before turning the gun on herself in a murder-suicide attempt. Glenna denied killing Martin, but she left three suicide notes, one to her husband and one to each of her children. Her husband's relatives believe they argued over unpaid bills and her gambling debts.

Doreen Plotkowski, owner of Casa La Parrot in Grand Rapids, said that African grey parrots typically vocalise phrases they've heard many times, but the birds also are capable of using words they've heard on only a few occasions. Presented with video evidence of the bird using the violent language, Plotkowski said that she "definitely" heard the bird mimicking an argument between a man and a woman.

However, many are sceptical. Glenn Reynolds, a spokesperson for the World Parrot Trust, a conservation and welfare organisation, said it is extremely rare, though not impossible, for a parrot to hear something once and then repeat it – although he admitted that "an African grey is probably the best at it." Reynolds, who used to breed parrots, said his wild-caught African greys didn't pick up any speech patterns at all, but that those he raised were very chatty. "I have heard them mimic voices that were so close to the person's voice that you would think it's that person," he said. "A friend of mine had an African grey for many years. When the phone rang, the parrot would say, 'Chris, telephone' in his mother's voice and, 'OK, I got it' in Chris's."

Michael Walsh, a Muskegon attorney, said that Bud's testimony is inadmissible because there's no way to determine the provenance of the dialogue it repeats; it could have been from a television programme. However, the prosecuting attorney said Bud's squawks had not yet been ruled out as potential evidence. It would not be the first time a parrot's statement has been considered for use in a murder trial. In 1993, a lawyer argued that an African Grey might hold the key to who killed its owner, Jane Gill, in Santa Rosa, California, in 1991; but a judge ruled the evidence could not be used ['Parrot overruled" **FT73:7**]. However, a cockatoo called Bozo was called to give evidence in a 1990 divorce case in Argentina [**FT59:9**]. *Wood TV, Channel 8, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2 June; Washington Post, 5 June; [AP] 6 June; Detroit Free Press, 27 June' Times, D.Telegraph, 29 June 2016.*

UBER PUPPET

Uber driver Jason B Dalton, 45, fatally shot six people and wounded two others in and around Kalamazoo, Michigan, on 20 February. After his arrest, he told police he was controlled by the ride-hailing app through his Uber smartphone, "like artificial intelligence that can tap into your body." He said that when you "plug into" the Uber app, "you can actually feel the presence on you". On the night of the shootings, an icon on the app, normally red, "had changed to black". He said that when he opened the app, "a devil head popped up on the screen and when I pressed the button on the app, that is when all the problems started… the devil figure… would give you an assignment."

In March, Dalton sued Uber for $10 million, claiming the company ripped him off and failed to pay him back wages and overtime. "My life is ruined because of Uber," he said. "My wife is divorcing me because of Uber." The company issued a statement saying: "It's hard to know how to respond to someone who refuses to take responsibility for his own actions." *Int. NY Times, 23 Feb; Breitbart.com, 15 Mar; Irish Examiner, 16 Mar; (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 18 Mar 2016.*

SIDELINES...

NEW REPTILE MENACE

Three Nile crocodiles have been found living in Florida's swamps, and more may well be at large. The animals were found in 2009, 2011 and 2014 and identified by a recent DNA test. How the African species arrived in the US is unknown; maybe they were brought in by unlicensed collectors who failed to keep them secured or intentionally released them. The Nile species can grow to up to 6m (20ft), significantly larger than local alligators, which commonly grow up to 4m (13ft). In Africa, they are thought to kill up to 200 people a year. *BBC News, 21 May 2016.*

SURPRISE PURCHASE

A Malaysian man paid £83 online for a penis enlarger – and received a magnifying glass with a simple instruction: "Do not use in sunlight". Lawyer Alex Kok [sic] said suing the scammers was almost impossible. "There is no proof of purchase," he said. *Metro, 5 June 2014.*

WHAT A BUMMER!

A couple who thought they had won the £35 million Lottery jackpot were left empty-handed after failing to top up their online account. Despite picking all six winning numbers, Edwina and David Nylan, from Leicester, discovered that although the Lotto mobile app they use to play confirmed their purchase, the transaction didn't go through to Camelot, as there was only 60p in the account. *D.Telegraph, 2 Jan 2016.*

FOOLED AGAIN

In yet another re-enactment of the urban legend dubbed "the Mexican pet", a Chinese villager who thought he had adopted a stray puppy was shocked to learn it was an Asian black bear, an endangered species. His suspicions were aroused when the "black ball of fur" he found in Yunnan province developed a voracious appetite and grew into an unfamiliar form with no tail. *Metro, 6 May 2016.*

Supernatural snaps?

Republican vampire daughter and mystery ghost hand

COUNTING PENCE

In the US presidential race, Donald Trump's running mate, Mike Pence, inadvertently created an Internet frenzy on 16 July when he posted a picture of his family on Twitter that some have taken as evidence that his daughter is a vampire, or perhaps a ghost. Pence shared what initially appeared to be a normal photo of his family enjoying a meal in a Chili's restaurant while on the campaign trail in New York – only there was something very strange about it.

While Pence and his wife Karen's reflections can both be seen in the mirror behind them, his daughter Charlotte appears to have no reflection. An alternative explanation put forward is that someone inserted Charlotte with Photoshop, forgetting to give her a mirror image. Killjoys then suggested that Charlotte's reflection is obscured by that of her father because of the camera's position… but the vampire explanation is undoubtedly more entertaining. *rt.com, blacklistednews.com, 17 July 2016.*

GHOSTLY HAND

This photograph shows Irish girls working at a linen mill in 1900. They pose in their work clothes, each with a cord around the waist holding their tools of the trade. The photograph was sent to *Belfast Live* by someone called Lynda, who wrote: "Great to see an old photo of my Granny, when she worked at the mill. She was Ellen Donnelly (née McKillop) and she is fourth on the right in the second row down. My dad has this photo at home… a family ghost picture!" She then drew attention to the mysterious hand on the shoulder of the girl sitting just below her grandmother. A journalist at the *Irish Mirror* (27 June 2016) wrote: "We've tried to explain it as a trick of the light, or maybe as a ruffle on the girl's shirt – but neither quite add up."

SEM/UIG VIA GETTY IMAGES

THE SQUIRTER OF NEWQUAY

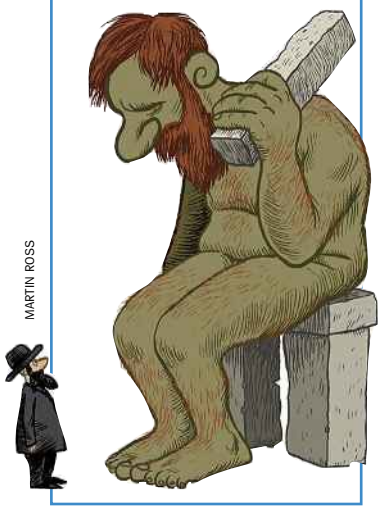
Motorists in Newquay town centre were left seeing red when a disabled woman on a mobility scooter reportedly squirted their cars with tomato ketchup. A grey-haired woman with glasses who was riding a red mobility scooter was spotted trundling away from the scene, though nobody could say for certain that she was the culprit. "Let's hope the police soon ketchup with her," quipped someone (allegedly). *Plymouth Herald, 9 July 2016.*

RUNAWAY ROBOT

A humanoid robot called Promobot IR77 caused traffic chaos when he ran away from a research centre in the Russian city of Perm and stopped in the middle of a road. He was reprogrammed but his wanderlust returned and developers were considering dismantling him; but activists said the freethinking robot had earned the right to remain 'alive'. *Times, 18 June; Metro, 22 June 2016.*

SATAN'S GIANTS

Speaking on a US TV show last April, Dr Dennis Lindsay, president and CEO of Christ For The Nations, claimed Satan created a race of giants to build Stonehenge and other ancient monuments – and also to infiltrate and destroy Israel. It was unclear how the English megalithic monument would help wipe out the Promised Land, but televangelists have little time for logic. *Huffington Post, 19 April 2016.*



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SPECIAL REPORT

THREE CENTURIES OF ENGLISH FREEMASONRY

DAVID V BARRETT is definitely on the level, if not quite ready to claim the Grand Master's throne

ALL PHOTOS: LIBRARY AN DMUSEUM OF FREEMASONRY, LONDON

ABOVE LEFT: The 'Three Centuries of English Freemasonry' exhibition. Centre stage is the Grand Master's throne, while behind it to the right is a portrait of George IV, who became Grand Master when he was Prince of Wales. **ABOVE RIGHT**: A typical Masonic lodge room in the exhibition. **BELOW**: A replica of the Goose and Gridiron pub sign.

Next year is the 300th anniversary of the founding of Freemasonry – except, of course, it isn't. Four London lodges are said to have met in the Goose and Gridiron tavern outside St Paul's Cathedral on 24 June 1717 to set up a Grand Lodge, which split in two in 1751, then reunited as United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) in 1813. Clearly, those four lodges already existed before 1717, and in fact there are records of antiquary Elias Ashmole being accepted into a lodge in Warrington in 1646, and scientist Robert Moray in Edinburgh in 1641. We've no idea how long masonic lodges existed before then. There's even doubt amongst some masonic historians that the Grand Lodge was created in 1717; the first we hear about it is in a book called the *Constitutions* published in 1723 and not known for its historical reliability. Author James Anderson mentioned that all the early records of masonic lodges had unfortunately been destroyed in a fire; clearly anticipating challenges, he wondered whether the fire might have been set deliberately to hide masonic craftsmen's secrets from the new gentlemen Freemasons. I've argued elsewhere that it's far more likely it was to destroy any evidence of Freemasonry's earlier history.[1] George I had come to the throne in 1714; the Hanoverians were widely loathed; the first Jacobite rebellion had occurred in 1715; Freemasonry had strong Scottish roots – so by enforcing a London-based, highly centralised organisation run by Whigs, with royal dukes as grand masters, the Hanoverian establishment gained control of a body which attracted educated, influential middle-class gentlemen. Educated, influential middle-class gentlemen wearing smart suits and carrying smart flat briefcases can be seen today in and around Freemasons' Hall on Great Queen Street, London.

United Grand Lodge will be celebrating the anniversary of official British Freemasonry next year with, amongst much else, a huge event in the Royal Albert Hall – but they've already opened up a new permanent exhibition, "Three Centuries of English Freemasonry", alongside their existing museum in Freemasons Hall, to trace the history of the movement. It's worth a visit.

You enter under a replica of the Goose and Gridiron pub sign; the original is in the Museum of London. One of the problems with displays of masonic memorabilia is that portraits (however huge and historic), aprons (however beautifully embroidered) and jewels (however exquisite) don't really give an impression of what Freemasonry *is*, only what it looks like. Masons love their bling; the main museum has a lot of regalia and well-polished silverware.

You enter beneath the Goose and Gridiron sign

Unusually, this new exhibition sets out to say something about what Freemasonry is all about. There are displays on the principles of Freemasonry, with text about integrity, charity, inclusivity and tolerance. Sociability as well: the festive board has always been an essential part of masonic gatherings. Inclusivity and tolerance are made clear in a lodge membership list that includes (at a time when this was otherwise not socially acceptable) names which are clearly Jewish. A piece of doggerel hung over a window delights in Freemasonry accepting, amongst others, a Jew, a Muslim, a Hindu, a Sikh and a Catholic: "Outside – 'Sergeant! Sir! Salute! Salaam!' Inside – 'Brother', an' it doesn't do no 'arm." More symbolically, there are two small blocks of stone, the rough ashlar and the smooth (or perfect) ashlar, representing the imperfect, uninitiated mason and his development into an improved, upstanding life.

Over the last three centuries Freemasonry has added to the richness of our language: giving someone the third degree, on the level, hoodwink, blackballed – this last being from the ballot box where masons dropped in

ABOVE LEFT: Polished and rough ashlars. **ABOVE RIGHT**: Royal Arch tracing boards. **BELOW LEFT**: Lodge room in a bottle (c.1795). The Master is standing on a chair and has ginger hair. This attention to detail may indicate that the figure is based on a real individual. **BELOW RIGHT**: Mask used in the initiatory ritual for the Oddfellows.

a white or a black ball to vote on accepting new members; one example is in the exhibition.

Climate-controlled cases hold some of the earliest documents of Freemasonry. There's the Articles of Union, when the two rival grand lodges reunited in 1813. And there's a first edition of the 1723 edition of Anderson's *Constitutions*, that problematic document which almost certainly fudged rather than revealed the accurate origins of the movement.

At the centre of the exhibition is the massive Grand Master's ceremonial throne; this was commissioned when the then Prince of Wales (later Prince Regent and later George IV) became the first royal prince to become Grand Master. Inevitably there are portraits of masonic royals: George IV, and more recently Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, who has been Grand Master since 1967. (Prince Philip is apparently an inactive member, but neither Charles, William nor Harry has shown any interest.)

There are masonic memorabilia of the great and the good, such as Sir Winston Churchill's apron – but there are also touching items relating to well-known masons in very different fields: apron pouches, small leather satchels, belonging to England cricket captain Wally Hammond, land-speed record holder Sir Malcolm Campbell and circus owner Billy Smart. But the exhibition also

PAINTON COWEN

celebrates the masonic careers of more ordinary people: a Belgian refugee to England in 1914, a surveyor who was a mason in Nicosia in 1915 and Palestine in the 1930s. Touching, also, is a mason's apron made out of paper during the occupation of Jersey in the Second World War.

Freemasonry isn't the only fraternal charitable organisation; there's a stunning early 20th-century ritual mask from an Oddfellows ritual. United Grand Lodge, which runs Freemasonry in England and Wales, and sees itself as the model for similar grand lodges around the world, is still a male-only organisation and unlikely to change. But it accepts the existence of female lodges: the exhibition features a small section on the

Honourable Fraternity of Antient Masonry (now the Order of Women Freemasons) founded in 1908 and its 1913 spin-off, the Honourable Fraternity of Ancient Freemasonry. HFAM was itself a secession from the Co-Masonic group associated with Theosophist Annie Besant, which founded its first lodge in Britain for men and women in 1902. Schisms are common in all esoteric organisations. A different sort of split was with continental Freemasonry; when the Grand Orient of France became more political, and in 1877 abandoned the requirement for members to believe in a Supreme Being, UGLE broke off links with it, a division which continues today.

For much of its history Freemasonry has been secretive about its rituals and symbolism. It's perhaps a sign of an increasing openness that there are representations of tracing boards – esoteric symbols used in the initiation and teaching of masons – not just for the first three degrees but for the Royal Arch degree, seen as both the "culmination" of the third degree and the doorway to the many "side degrees". There are two delightful historical representations of masonic meetings: a paper model of a masonic lodge from c.1750 and a lodge room in a bottle from c.1795. Best of all, at the end of the exhibition doors open onto a typical masonic lodge room – something that most of us don't ever get to see – with its checkerboard floor, special seats for officials, candlesticks and tracing board.

Freemasons' Hall has free tours most days, taking in the sumptuous Grand Temple; add to that an hour or so in this tercentennial exhibition and the main museum for a fascinating introduction to a world of esoteric symbolism in what is for many their everyday life.

Freemasons' Hall
60 Great Queen Street
London WC2B 5AZ
www.freemasonry.london.museum

1 "The Confused Origins of Freemasonry", *The Square*, Dec 2014.

MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING excavates the latest archæological discoveries concerning Tutankhamun, including research suggesting that one of the metal daggers found in his tomb had an extraterrestrial origin...

TUTANKHAMUN'S SPACE DAGGER

A dagger entombed with King Tutankhamun was probably made with iron from a meteorite, according to research published last May in the journal *Meteoritics & Planetary Science*. In 1925, Howard Carter found two daggers, one iron and one with a blade of gold, within the wrapping of the teenage king, who was mummified around 1323 BC.

The iron blade, which had a gold handle, rock crystal pommel and lily and jackal-decorated sheath, has puzzled researchers in the decades since Carter's discovery: ironwork was rare in ancient Egypt, and the dagger's metal had not rusted. Italian and Egyptian researchers analysed the metal with an X-ray fluorescence spectrometer to determine its chemical composition, and found its high nickel content, along with its levels of cobalt, "strongly suggests an extraterrestrial origin". They compared the composition with 20 known meteorites within 1,250 miles (2,000km) around the Red Sea coast of Egypt, and found similar levels in the Kharga meteorite, discovered at the seaport city of Mersa Matruh 150 miles (240km) west of Alexandria in 2000. Although people have worked with copper, bronze and gold since 4,000 BC, ironwork came much later, and was rare in ancient Egypt.

It is possible that Tutankhamun's dagger was made outside his kingdom. Egyptians traded with the Hittites of modern-day Turkey and other neighbouring civilisations, some of which are thought to have had more advanced metalworking skills.

In 1911, nine blackened iron beads were excavated from a pre-dynastic burial site in the Lower Egypt village of el-Gerzeh, and are now kept at the University College London (UCL) Petrie Museum. In 2013, using prompt-gamma neutron activation analysis (PGAA), these beads were found to have higher than normal concentrations of nickel, phosphorus, cobalt and germanium (or 'geranium' according to *Metro*), indicating meteoritic origin. X-ray scanners, meanwhile, showed that the iron had been repeatedly heated and hammered to make precious jewels for the afterlife. They date to 3,200 BC – far older than the young pharaoh.

ABOVE: Tutankhamun's gold and iron daggers.

"As the only two valuable iron artefacts from ancient Egypt so far accurately analysed are of meteoritic origin," the team that studied the knife wrote, "we suggest that ancient Egyptians attributed great value to meteoritic iron for the production of fine ornamental or ceremonial objects". The researchers also put forward the hypothesis that ancient Egyptians placed great importance on rocks falling from the sky. They suggested that the finding of a meteoritic iron dagger adds meaning to the use of the term "iron" in ancient texts, and noted around the 13th century BC, a term "literally translated as 'iron of the sky' came into use... to describe all types of iron". It took another 3,000 years or so for Western science to accept that meteorites were indeed heaven-sent.

Thilo Rehren, an archæologist with University College London, said that other objects from Tutankhamun's tomb, including jewellery and miniature daggers, are believed to be made from meteoritic iron. "Yes, the Egyptians referred to this stuff as metal from the heaven, which is purely descriptive," he said. "What I find impressive is that they were capable of creating such delicate and well manufactured objects in a metal of which they didn't have much experience."

In 2013, chemical analysis of a polished pebble set in a scarab brooch and found in Tut's tomb provided the first solid evidence of a comet that smashed into the Sahara 28 million years ago, creating a 'sea' of glass and diamonds. The heavenly missile heated up the desert sand to about 2000˚C (3632˚F), scattering yellow silica glass over 6,000 km^2 (2,300 sq miles). Among the debris was the diamond-bearing pebble polished and set in the pharaoh's brooch.

Egyptologist Joyce Tyldesley, of the University of Manchester, has argued that ancient Egyptians would have revered celestial objects that had plunged to Earth. "The sky was very important to the ancient Egyptians," she told *Nature*, apropos of her work on the meteoritic beads. "Something that falls from the sky is going to be considered as a gift from the gods." [AFP], *Guardian, 20 Aug; Metro, 10 Oct 2013; Guardian, 2 June; D.Telegraph, 3 June 2016.*

● The long-awaited investigation of Tutankhamun's tomb to see if there is a hidden chamber or chambers, possibly containing the mummy of Nefertiti [see **FT335:4**], has been delayed. Adam Lowe, director of Factum Arte (which created the impressive facsimile of the tomb that opened to the public near the Valley of the Kings last March) told me on 11 June: "The news is slow and sketchy and as with all things Egyptian it is shrouded in politics. Two tests have revealed Nick Reeves is right [that there is a hidden chamber or chambers], while one has cast doubt on the certainty. The minister has changed, there are those for and against – I expect this will rumble on for some time."

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

202: BREXITUS

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

"Of course, between autocracy and democracy, nothing but false demarcation can be drawn" – Fort, *Books*, p286.

The Brexit result has inevitably provoked heated debate over the Referendum principle, the sceptical side showing a long thread from Aristophanes's *Clouds* (423 BC) to Mary Beard (TLS, 1 July 2016, 16).

Referendum is not a Latin noun, but a gerund from the verb *referre*, for which the Oxford Latin Dictionary lists 19 separate meanings. In the Roman Republic, 'People Power' was first exercised by a Secessio Plebis, whereby the plebs physically abandoned the city, thus closing it down, the ancestor of our General Strike.

This weapon was, though, infrequently exercised. Only five are definitely recorded (primarily by Livy), between 494 and 287. The first concerned plebeian debt and lack of political representation. The second (449) demanded a fairer set of laws. The third (445) was in support of the right of intermarriage between the classes. The fourth (342) seems to have been some sort of military coup, as abortive as the recent Turkish one, though not followed by Erdogan-style purges. The last, and most far-reaching, one was in support of a law proposed by the dictator Hortensius to make Plebiscita (from which, obviously, 'Plebiscite') passed by the Plebeian or People's Council binding on all classes – one may wonder how democratic *that* was, whilst surprise that a dictator should entrench People Power is obviated by the fact that until Sulla and Cæsar, Roman dictators were legally nominated and elected, with specific powers and limitations.

Quick back-track. The law allowing social intermarriage was (after its proposer) called the Lex Canuleia. In James Hilton's *Goodbye, Mr Chips* (1934), the ever-punning Mr Chipping offers the following mnemonic to his Roman history class: "So, you see, if Miss Plebs wanted Mr Patrician to marry her, and he said he couldn't, she probably replied, 'Oh yes, you can, you liar'."

In his 2014 lecture, 'Athenian Civilization: The Glory That Endures', Boris Johnson rhapsodised: "Ostracism could happen to anyone. You just needed a quorum of 6,000 to vote on their pet hates and, kapow, you were spending the next 10 years twiddling your thumbs in Bulgaria. You can imagine the sense of personal power and confidence that gave to the people who scratched on the potsherds, and who saw instant and gratifying results from their participation in the democratic process."

I'm with Boris on this one. All *FT* readers will have their own lists of politicians they'd like to see exiled (for 10 years, though their property was not confiscated, they could return or, in emergencies, be recalled).

Ostracism derives from the Greek *ostrakon*, which means 'potsherd' – thus originating the pots-herd mentality? Many thousands of these shards with names scratched thereon have been found in the Athenian Agora and (logically) the Kerameikos or Potters' Quarter; cf. Eugene Vanderpool, *Ostracism at Athens* (1970). Use of these shards – not unique to Athens – denotes ancestry of modern recycling. Perhaps we could use discarded chip wrappers as ballot papers? And, in 2000 Florida, there'd have been no 'hanging shards'…

Main sources for ostracism are Aristotle's *Constitution of Athens* (only rediscovered in 1879), and Plutarch's *Lives of* Alcibiades, Nicias, and Pericles. Early each year, the People were asked if they wanted an ostracism. If so, one was duly held, with 6,000 votes the minimum required against a particular individual.

Thanks to mass illiteracy – actual proportion is endlessly debated; cf. anything by WV Harris – there was ample scope for voter fraud. There were cases of pre-inscribed shards being distributed at large. The most famous example (retailed by Plutarch) concerns an illiterate who approached prominent politician – not recognising him – Aristides, nicknamed 'The Just', and asking him to write that name on his ostrakon. Aristides did so, not letting on, but asking, "What's he ever done to you?" The answer was, "Oh, Nothing, I'm just sick and tired of hearing everybody calling him 'The Just'.

Just as one might write 'Wanker' by (say) Blair or Cameron, so Athenians added disobliging adjectives to their chosen victim. Samples: 'Agasias, Donkey', 'Archen, Foreigner-Lover' – how contemporary-sounding is that? – 'Callixenes, Traitor', 'Megacles, Adulterer'.

Many potsherds have names of otherwise totally (to us) unknown individuals. Modernly classified as 'Scatter-Votes', these might either be taken at face value, or thought to be their own names inscribed by political wannabes trying for a spot of free publicity.

Surprisingly (?), ostracism was sparingly used. From inception (487) to abandonment (416), only a dozen or so are recorded. Big names frequently topped this anti-poll, notably Persian Wars hero Themistocles, whose dumping is comparable to the 1945 electoral ousting of Churchill.

In 416, the demagogue Hyperbolus – successor to Cleon who had introduced the oratorical techniques of thigh-slapping, clothes ripping, and running around whilst speechifying, himself by profession a lamp-maker who illuminated nothing – was hoping for ostracism of either Alcibiades or Nicias. But, this pair of political rivals stitched Hyperbolus up by arranging for their supporters to combine against him (Exit Hyperbolus, subsequently murdered in exile). People felt this chicanery had somehow dishonoured the procedure, and ostracism was never again used. (Full story in my 'Notes on Hyperbolus,' *Acta Classica* 14, 1971, 151-56.

As the comic playwright Plato quipped: "The man deserved the fate; the fate did not deserve the man."

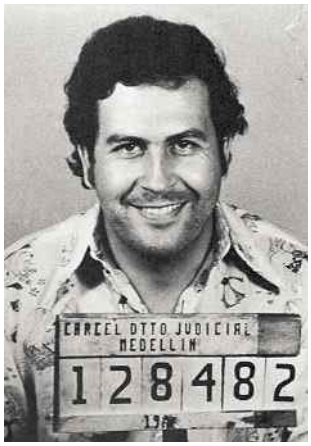
At Syracuse, a curious variant (called Petalismos –'petalism') was used, equally sparingly and with a similarly short history (details in the Sicilian Diodorus's *Historical Library*, bk11 chs86-7). Instead of potsherds, voters had to inscribe their choice of names on an olive leaf. Surely a tricky business – inventor of this daft idea must have been an early advocate of Flower Power.

Some poor-loser Remainers are demanding a second referendum. Classical precedent for this. The sovereign Athenian People's Assembly, whose every decision required a 6,000 quorum vote, may fairly be dubbed government by permanent referendum. In 428/7 BC, it voted to punish the rebel city of Mytilene by mass execution of its males. Overnight, a change of mood produced a second vote, which overturned this punishment. A ship set out at full speed and arrived just in time to avert the massacre – "Second thoughts are ever wiser", Euripides, *Hippolytus*, v456.

" Almost all people of all eras are hypnotics. The proper authorities saw to it that the proper belief should be induced, and people behaved properly" – Fort, p1061.

Haunted by Pablo's hippos

How a dead drug baron's pet pachyderms colonised the Colombian countryside



ABOVE: Pablo Escobar. **LEFT:** His estate had its a private airport, a bullring and a zoo full of exotic animals. **BELOW:** One of the 35-50 hippos – supposedly the largest herd outside Africa – that now thrive in the area's rivers and farms.

PHOTOS: RAUL ARBOLEDA / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Colombia's cocaine kingpin Pablo Escobar was shot dead on 2 December 1993, aged 44, but continues to haunt the country with his herd of hippos. The Medellín Cartel boss, regarded as one of the most prolific criminals in history, built a narco-empire worth $30 billion (£23 billion) on the bodies of thousands of murdered individuals. At the height of his career, he supplied an estimated 80 per cent of the cocaine smuggled into the US. Since the 1980s he had owned a lavish Spanish colonial estate, the Hacienda Nápoles, in the lowlands of Antioquia, some three hours outside of Medellín, where he had his own airport, private bullring, cart racing track, sculpture garden, a collection of dinosaur skeletons, and a zoo filled with smuggled exotica such as elephants, giraffes, antelope, ostriches and zebras.

When *El Patrón* died, many of the animals were taken into care, but the four hippos (three female and one male) escaped into nearby waterways, such as the Magdalena River. Vigorous breeding has swelled the herd to more than 50, the largest invasive species in the world. This could cause a problem for native wildlife such as otters and manatees; hippos carry diseases that can kill livestock and they pollute the watercourses where they defecate. In cramped river systems, hippo crap can flood the water with excess nutrients, stimulating noxious algæ blooms and starving fish and invertebrates of oxygen. "This is a paradise for [the hippos]," said a local vet. "They have no predators so they are more at peace than they would be in their natural habitat and they

His private zoo was filled with smuggled exotic animals

ABOVE: Signs in the area warn of the potential danger posed by Escobar's hippos.

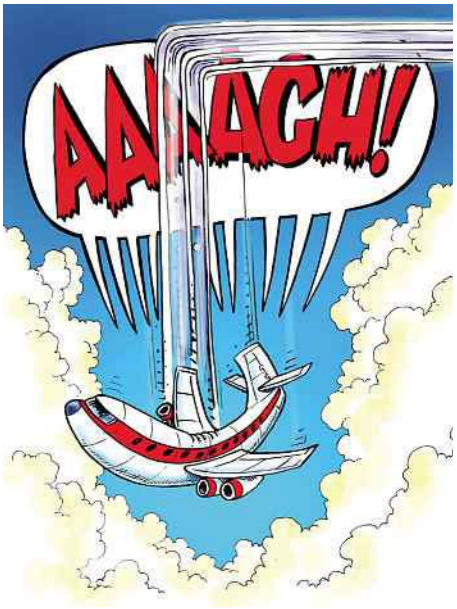
have been reproducing faster." Despite its vegetarian diet, the hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibious*), the world's third-largest land mammal, is aggressive and the combination of size (males average 3,300lb/1,500kg), sharp teeth and mobility in and out of the water make for a fearsome beast.

Colombia is at a loss how to deal with the giant megafauna. One survey estimated they will continue to grow at an annual rate of six per cent, and every fertile female is expected to give birth to a new calf each year. Local people have grown fond of them; though they are the most dangerous creatures in Africa – killing almost 3,000 people a year – they have yet to kill a Colombian. Last year, one of them was spotted meandering around a local elementary school. In 2014, the press carried a photo of a small girl in a village sitting on the floor with a seemingly tame hippo lying next to her. Later that year, another girl told the *El Colombiano* newspaper she kept one as a pet. "My father brought a little one home once," she said. "I called him Luna [Moon] because he was very sweet. We fed him with just milk." In 2009 one of the hippos, Pepe, was tracked down and shot by the Army. Animal rights activists unleashed a storm of condemnation, as well as a flash mob of 100 hippo-masked protesters in Bogotá. Authorities have tried to capture and castrate the animals, to little avail; they hide underwater for much of the day, and are very tricky to tranquillise. Barriers of rocks, trees and wire are being built to keep the hefty pachyderms from roaming too far, and fodder grown to keep them happy where they are – but hippos have been sighted up to 100 miles (160km) away from Escobar's hacienda. *D.Telegraph, 6 July; motherboard.vice.com, 7 July 2016.*

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

104: AIR POCKETS



The myth

When you're in an aeroplane and it suddenly lurches and drops and you feel yourself rising out of your seat and your guts migrate into your mouth – that's because the plane has hit an air pocket, a sort of gap in the sky, and is briefly in freefall.

The "truth"

There are no airless gaps in the sky, any more than there are waterless gaps in a river. Even though it is regularly described as the number one fear amongst those with flying phobias, and is a phrase that's been in continuous use since at least WWI, the air pocket – an area of sky where a sudden lack of air causes the plane to plummet – is an impossibility. What does happen is that upward or downward drafts cause turbulence, which is felt for a few seconds as a "bump in the road". But aeroplanes never actually "fall" – they just move up or down by a few feet, rarely more than 10 or 20, perhaps 50 in extreme cases. At all times, the wings are still experiencing lift; the plane is still flying. Although very severe air turbulence can occasionally cause damage to a plane, a leading expert on the subject says he has "never heard of" a commercial flight brought down by turbulence. All the same, a few staff or passengers every year are injured by it – mainly through the spilling of hot drinks, or people stumbling in the gangway.

Sources

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Disclaimer

This column makes no pretence to expertise in physics, so if we've got it wrong please drop in at the letters column and scream a correction at us.

Mythchaser

A reader in Devon recalls a scene familiar from decades of comics, silent films and TV sitcoms – the skint customer who pays for their restaurant meal by doing the washing-up – and asks simply: has this ever happened in real life?

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SPECIAL REPORT

BIG CATS STILL STALK BRITAIN

PAUL SIEVEKING addresses the state of the nation's mystery moggies and phantom felids

EVENING STANDARD / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: It has been alleged that circus owner Mary Chipperfield released three of her favourite captive pumas into the wilds of Dartmoor in the 1970s.

Twenty odd years ago, I noted that "a fleeting glimpse of an ABC (Alien Big Cat) has become the most common brush with the unknown in Britain". This probably still holds true. The mystery beasts have entered national folklore by the powerful act of naming: consider the Surrey Puma (a term coined in 1964), the Fen Tiger (1978), the Beast of Exmoor (1983), and the Beast of Bodmin (1992). Tabloid journalists can seldom resist alliteration – hence the Beast of Bont (Ceredigion), Beast of Brechfa (Carmarthenshire), Beast of Bennachie (Aberdeenshire), Balbirnie Beast (Fife), Beast of Broomhill (Yorkshire), Beast of Blagdon (Somerset), Beast of Ballymeana (Northern Ireland), and so on.

From witness descriptions, the most common ABC is Alsatian-sized and melanistic (black) – a colour possible only among leopards and jaguars, but rarely found in their native habitats or among captive animals – which only accentuates the weirdness of ABCs.

As we were putting the finishing touches to this feature, the *Manchester Evening News* reported a classic ABC sighting in Radcliffe, Greater Manchester. On 20 July, a farmer called the council and RSPCA to report a "black panther" he had seen chasing two deer in a field off Bury New Road, at the back of his house. He was advised to contact the police, who conducted a search but found nothing. *D.Mirror (online), 21 July 2016.*

The enigmatic felids turn up from Suffolk to South Wales

One aspect that troubles naturalists is the improbable ubiquity of ABCs: the enigmatic felids have turned up from Suffolk to South Wales, Cornwall to Caithness, with hundreds of reported sightings every year. While most ABCs are black – investigators Merrily Harpur and Mark Fraser estimate 80 to 90 per cent – generalisations are hazardous: in the last 50 years, the British countryside seems to have played host to lynx, puma, cheetah, serval, and maybe caracal, ocelot, lion, tiger… The felids are black, grey, all shades of brown, and even white; they are striped, spotted, with long legs, short legs, long tails, short tails, with ear-tufts, without ear-tufts; and so on.

Of course, many supposed ABCs are misidentifications of indigenous animals; but over the years, the scepticism of the experts has been eroded by the many anecdotal reports from experienced observers, occasional ABC attacks on humans, and the evidence from spoor, droppings, livestock

depredation, video footage, hair on fences, and out-of-place felids trapped or shot [**FT167:30-31**]. There have been numerous (and typically blurry) ABC photos since the one taken by Ian Pert in Worpleston, Surrey, in August 1966; and many livestock depredations since a bull was found lacerated near Crondall, Surrey, in August 1964. Hair identified as puma was found near Peaslake, Surrey, in 1984, and on Exmoor in 1987.

An error of logic, repeated ad nauseam in ABC reports, is that the MAFF (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) investigation into the 'Beast of Bodmin' in 1995 somehow 'proved' that there were no ABCs in Cornwall. While the government investigators found "no verifiable evidence" for the presence of ABCs, they admitted that they "could not prove that a 'big cat' is not present." Put succinctly, you cannot prove a negative.

For the last 40 years, journalists have reached for the 1976 Dangerous Wild Animals Act to 'explain' ABCs. It was suggested that many owners, loath to obtain the expensive licences required by the Act, had released big cats into the countryside. This ignores the fact that many 'cat flaps' preceded the Act. The Day Book at the Godalming police station in Surrey lists 362 reported sightings across Britain of alien animals provisionally identified as 'pumas' in the two years between September 1964 and August 1966. In June 1974, several 'panther' sightings in Ayrshire led to sharpshooters and police standing by. In April 1975, there was a huge search for a 'panther' in Willenhall in the heart of the industrial conurbation north-west of Birmingham.

However… In 2000, former lion-tamer Leslie Maiden admitted releasing a panther and a cougar into the English countryside in 1974. Maiden, of Dudley, West Midlands, who once owned more than a dozen big cats, said he released the animals "miles from anywhere" on the Pennines at Snake Pass in Derbyshire. Fellow big cat-owner Lewis Foley, who kept the animals at a menagerie with Maiden, disclosed that a friend of his in Coventry had also set a panther loose in the Nottinghamshire area in 1974. Then in February 2016, a certain Norman Catton of Halesowen, West Midlands, announced that his friend, the aforementioned Foley, a Black Country eccentric who kept three lions at his house in Cradley Heath back in the 1960s, had told him that he had unleashed the beasts on the Malvern Hills, along with a couple of other big cats for people who wished to dodge the licence fee following the passing of the 1976 Act. *Stourbridge News (online), 6 April 2007; Birmingham Mail (online), 6 Feb 2016.*

There is no doubt about the reality of Flaviu, a two-year-old male Carpathian lynx that escaped from Dartmoor Zoo in Devon on 6 July 2016, having chewed through a board in its enclosure and broken out. It had only just arrived from Port Lympne in Kent. Police launched a search with helicopters, drones, and night vision equipment and warned residents of nearby villages not to approach it (though lynxes are not dangerous unless cornered). A fortnight later, as I write, Flaviu is still at large.

On 20 July Benjamin Mee, owner of Dartmoor Zoo, said that the cat's disappearance was not the first. When he bought the zoo for £1 million in 2006, he was told about a pack of pumas that had allegedly been released into the wild in the late 1970s or early 1980s. He said: "There were lots of rumours and many different stories about how they got out. Some say they were released from the old zoo either by mistake or on purpose – we just don't know – while some others say they were being transported here at the time from the zoo in Plymouth. I have no knowledge of the circumstances about how it happened. But at the time there were three pumas that should have been here at Dartmoor Zoo that were not."

Danny Bamping, founder of the British Big Cats Society, said he had heard about the missing pumas from Ellis Daw (now 86), the zoo's previous owner, who had founded it as Dartmoor Wildlife Park in 1968. In the 1970s Plymouth Zoo was owned by the Chipperfields, the circus family. According to Daw, when the zoo was shut down, Mary Chipperfield agreed to transfer her five pumas to him at Dartmoor Wildlife Park, but when they arrived, there were only two pumas in the consignment but five tags in the cage. Chipperfield told him she had broken down on Dartmoor and that somehow three of the pumas had escaped, although he suspected she had released her favourite breeding pair on the moor plus a young male to keep them company. Chipperfield died in 2014. Her widower Roger Cawley, speaking from his new home in Spain where he breeds rare white tigers, denied Daw's story. Asked about it this July, he said: "We had no dealings with the old Dartmoor Wildlife Park all those years ago and certainly never released pumas or any other wild animals on Dartmoor." *D.Telegraph, 8+9+22 July; mirror.co.uk, 12 July 2016.*

"There have been a variety of reports over the years of deliberate releases of big or large exotic cats into the wild in Britain," said Danny Bamping. "The Dartmoor puma stories have been around for decades. However, there are other stories as well, featuring private owners on Dartmoor, and indeed Mr Daw himself having animals escape or deliberately released. What people forget is that there was no legal obligation to report *any* release or escape prior to the 1981 Countryside and Wildlife Act."

• Forensic evidence from livestock mutilations might effectively shift the ABC phenomenon from rural

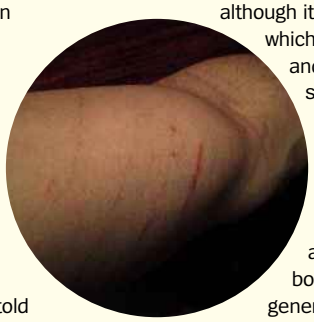
SWNS.COM

ABOVE: Lynx on the loose! Flaviu had just been transferred from Port Lympne in Kent when he escaped from Dartmoor Zoo.

SPECIAL REPORT

CLAWS FOR CONCERN?

As he walked home from a friend's house in the dark on 9 July 2015, hotel worker Nich Boden, 26, was knocked unconscious in remote woodland between Coniston and Hawkshead in Westmorland. He came to with a deep 5in (13cm) gouge on his left shoulder and apparent claw marks on his forearm. "All I really remember was being hit from my front right and because I smacked my head when I fell it was all a bit hazy after," he said. He told FT: "The various cuts and scratches were of interest because there was no barbed wire around, or anything obvious that could have caused them. I contacted the local paper because there had been a big cat sighting in the area the week before and I thought that my experience might be relevant. It's not beyond the realms of possibility that it was a cat I encountered, although it could have been a deer, which are known to bolt forward and knock people over when startled."



It certainly looked as if he had been attacked by a wild animal; some suggested a big cat. However, Dr Tom Smith, author of many medical books, said: "Animals generally attack from the back. The spaces between the claw [marks] are too large unless the cat was the size of a lion and no cat I know produces single slash marks." So what *did* happen to Nich Boden that night? *Westmorland Gazette, 16 July 2015.*

NICH BODEN

legend to actual zoology [see **FT285:4**]. In 2013, Dr Andrew Hemmings, senior lecturer in animal science at the Royal Agricultural University in Cirencester, analysed 20 skeletal animal remains recovered from Gloucestershire and nearby counties. The bones had been provided by volunteers, farmers and landowners and were selected because they had some form of unusual teeth markings on them, or the circumstances of the remains led to an indication they might have been killed by a big cat. The teeth markings left on the bones were analysed to establish which animals had feasted on them. In a quarter of the cases, Dr Hemmings found that the "tooth pit" indentations – markings made by canine teeth, as they clamp on the bones – were caused by something larger than species known to exist in the wild, such as badgers and foxes. However, as dogs' teeth can make similar indentations, a further analysis was carried out to look for markings made by carnassial teeth, used for shearing flesh and bone. In a big cat, these are far wider apart than in a dog, so the analysis allows dogs to be discounted as culprits.

In 17 cases there were insufficient markings to make a judgment, but in the remaining three they were not only clearly visible but indicated that big cats, rather than domestic dogs, were responsible. "All three are certainly wider than you would expect to find in a dog imprint," he said, "but we need to let the sample size build up before we have anything approaching a statistical basis." Of the three bones, handed in between August and October, two were from sika deer – one a lower jaw and the other a pelvis – both found in heathland in Dorset, along the county's Jurassic coastline, while the third was a lower jaw from a wild boar found in west Gloucestershire. Both counties are known for scores of ABC sightings. In September 2013, for instance, Leah Doney and her children had been stalked by such a creature while picking blackberries in Rodborough, near Stroud, Gloucestershire. (*telegraph.co.uk, 3 Nov 2013.*)

• Could some of these big cats have been teleported from their natural habitat, as Fort playfully suggested (*Lo!* Chapter 7), or do they exist in our physical world only fleetingly, as other denizens of the fortean menagerie seem to? It is certainly bizarre that numerous ABC hunts with state-of-the-art technology have invariably failed, while the majority of large felids that are known to have escaped from zoos are caught or killed. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, all but two of the 16 big cats that escaped into the wild in the UK between 1977 and 1998 were recaptured within 24 hours. However, talk of tulpas, phantoms and teleportation will not appeal to cryptozoologists or strict adherents of Occam's Razor.

• Through the 1990s, I compiled an annual nationwide survey of ABC sightings, based on clippings received from local and national papers, but I stopped around the turn of the century. Clippings received at Fortean Towers failed to give an accurate picture of the overall phenomenon, reflecting as they did the distribution of FT clipsters and the whims of local journalists. Data-gathering groups and police have logged hundreds of incidents that never made it to the newspapers; and beyond that there are bound to be many witnesses who have kept their ABC sightings to themselves, fearing ridicule. In 2003 I did a survey of 40 years of liminal pussycats starting with the July 1963 'cheetah hunt' in Shooters Hill, south London, that first drew national attention to the subject [**FT167:28-37**]. In 2007 Jen Ogilvie did the last of our comprehensive round-ups of sightings, taking us up to 2006 [**FT224:33-41**], since when Merrily Harpur provided us with ABC updates for a while.

It is clear that UK press coverage of mystery big cats has fallen off dramatically since 2012. Why this has happened is unclear; perhaps fortean phenomena go out of fashion, like sea serpents and ectoplasm. According to the British Big Cat Society, the countryside still teems with ABCs, and we hear of occasional hunts on mainland Europe. In May 2012, there were sightings of a 'black panther' in woods near the town of Solothurn in western Switzerland (*Warwickshire Telegraph*, 10 May). On 27 January 2013, a large black cat was seen at Villeneuve-Loubet, Alpes-Maritimes, southern France, leading to a massive fruitless hunt by police and firefighters (*The Local*, France, 28 Jan). And on 19 August that year there were half a dozen sightings of a "black panther" in Berga, southern Spain, prompting a fruitless hunt over four days (AP, 23 Aug).

BIG CATS UK 2012-2016

Below I have summarised the result of my trawl through the last five years of ABC files in the Archives for Fortean Research.

2012

In January, an ABC was filmed at Woodchester National Park, near Stroud, Gloucestershire, near where two mutilated roe deer carcases had been found not long before; but samples from the deer showed fox rather than feline DNA. Twelve miles (19km) away, three wallabies were found stripped to the bone, with their internal organs beside the bodies; puncture wounds to the neck suggested an ABC attack. Gloucestershire police logged 75 ABC reports between 2005 and 2011.

In February came news of a 10-minute film of an ABC at c.300 yards taken in July 2009 by Coryn Memory near her house in Thrupp, Gloucestershire. It was thought to show a black leopard, 2ft (60cm) tall at shoulder and 6ft (1.2m) nose to tail-tip. Ms Memory claimed five sightings. Also, between 12 and 19 February, there were three sightings around Gloucester (in Hempstead, Barnwood and Kingsway).

On 25 January, an ABC was seen four yards (3.6m) away at Scout Scar, South Lakeland, Westmorland. (There had been previous sightings in Kendal, Levens, Natland, Witherslack and in the Winster Valley.) Also in January there were sightings in Anster, Hertfordshire, and beside the Oswestry bypass in Shropshire, at a distance of only 8ft (2.4m). In Somerset, big cats were seen in the Cheddar Valley, between Godney and Meare, and in Glastonbury, North Wootton, West Pennard and Chilcompton. Following a sighting at 50 yards (46m) on the Somerset Levels, between Bleadney and Godney, a mutilated deer and badger were found. An ABC was seen in Ham, near Sandwich in Kent, and – lexilinkers please note – three piglets were found eaten.

In February a huge pawprint, 4in (10cm) across, thought to be made by the "Calderdale catbeast", was found in Wheatley, Halifax, West Yorkshire. An ABC was seen the previous November in nearby Exley, along with a similar pawprint. Another pawprint was found at Binegar in Somerset's Mendip Hills on 9 February. Sometime that month, a "black panther" was chased out of a house in Seaford, East Sussex; a pawprint was found, and a further sighting made at South Chailey.

On Leapday (29 February), there was a sighting at Sandsend, near Whitby, North Yorkshire. In March, an ABC was seen at Sheerness, Isle of Sheppey, and another photographed at the Goggin, near Orleton in Hereford. April saw several sightings in Gretton, Northamptonshire, and pawprints (4x5in/10x13cm) were found at Eye Green near Peterborough.

In May, 20 sheep were found mutilated at Devil's Bridge in the Cambrian Mountains near Aberystwyth, West Wales. Most were stripped bare, leaving just fleece and bones. When 12 dead sheep were found mutilated at Ysbyty Ystwyth back in June 1981, the killer was dubbed 'The Beast of Bont' after a village at the centre of the animal's hunting area and just a few miles from the latest scene of slaughter. Livestock depredation continued through the 1990s, and there were sporadic sightings around Borth, Talybont, Talgarreg and Bontgoch.

There was a sighting at Scalby Mills, near Scarborough's North Bay, North Yorkshire, on 7 May, with further sightings in the week following, along with mauled deer carcases in Knipe Point woods. There were sightings near Flookburgh, Cumbria, on 10 July; at Thursby, near Carlisle, on 4 August; at Bradwell, Peak District, on 23 August (seen at 15ft/4.6m); and at Barnack, Cambridgeshire, on 27 August (with another sighting four days later). On 5 December, two ABCs were seen near Duxford, Cambridgeshire, and on 11 December a sandy-coloured ABC was seen 60ft (18m) away at night, picking up fish from the sea wall at Stallingborough, Lincolnshire.

The supposed 'lion' seen near Clacton-on-Sea, Essex, on 26 August was probably a local Maine Coon cat [see **FT293:4-5**]. In October, two dog-walkers saw a 'lion' stalking a housing estate in Bedford, and a brown ABC was seen in Brockworth, Gloucestershire.

Meanwhile in Scotland

On 28 January, a sheep carcase was found stripped bare at Swordley, near Bettyhill, north Sutherland. There were ABC sightings the previous December and in February this year. Pawprints were found in Corpach, Scottish Highlands, in March. In April, Scottish police announced they had investigated at least 125 ABC sightings since 2007, 69 of which were in Strathclyde, 30 in Fife, 18 in Tayside, nine in Grampian, and the remaining 12 in other regions. A spokesman for Fife police said: "We get a sighting every couple of months or so and from all over Fife. The most recent was a couple of weeks ago in St. Andrews. Reports are not coming in as often as they once did." On 1 August, a pale brown big cat with white-tipped ears and tail was seen at Hoddom, near Annan, Dumfries and Galloway. Other sightings were made near

ABOVE LEFT: Mutilated roe deer found at Woodchester National Park near Stroud. **ABOVE RIGHT**: Video footage showed a 'black leopard' in the same part of Gloucestershire.

SPECIAL REPORT

HENRY WARREN / SWNS.COM

ABOVE: In July 2014, Henry Warren photographed an apparent ABC in Gwinear, west Cornwall.

Kenmore, Perthshire, on 14 July; at Cuper, northeast Fife, on 10 August; at Glenlomond, near Kinnesswood, Fife, on 4 September, and the next day in Glenrothes, Fife. On 9 November, a 6ft (1.2m) long cat was seen outside Dundee.

2013

Sighting locations noted in the press included the Southfield area of Glenrothes, Fife in February; outside Uckfield Community Hospital, East Sussex, in May; in Candy Valley, Shropshire, in June; in Plumpton, East Sussex, on 13 June; and in Rutland, between Exton and Stamford, on 20 September. On 1 August, one was spotted at 20ft (6m) near Herne Common, Kent, three weeks after a sighting in Brogdale, Faversham. Earlier in the year, there were sightings in Kent of a "black leopard" in Bysing Wood, Blean Wood and Selling; a puma at Ospringe; and a lynx in Oare marshes.

At 2.30am on 22 August, a jet black ABC "three times the size of a fox" jumped in front of Jack Humphrey's car near Wellington, Shropshire. In September there was a sighting plus mutilated sheep carcases in the Hillsborough and Dromara areas of Co Down, Northern Ireland. A supposed sighting was made on 1 September in Petersfield, Hampshire, followed by the discovery of a footprint, later identified as canine. This critter might have been Christine Vincent's Maine Coon cat that had gone missing in the area a week earlier. October witnessed several sightings on the North Downs around Folkstone in Kent, and around Dorchester in Dorset. In December, ABCs were seen in Swindon Village and Staverton in Gloucestershire.

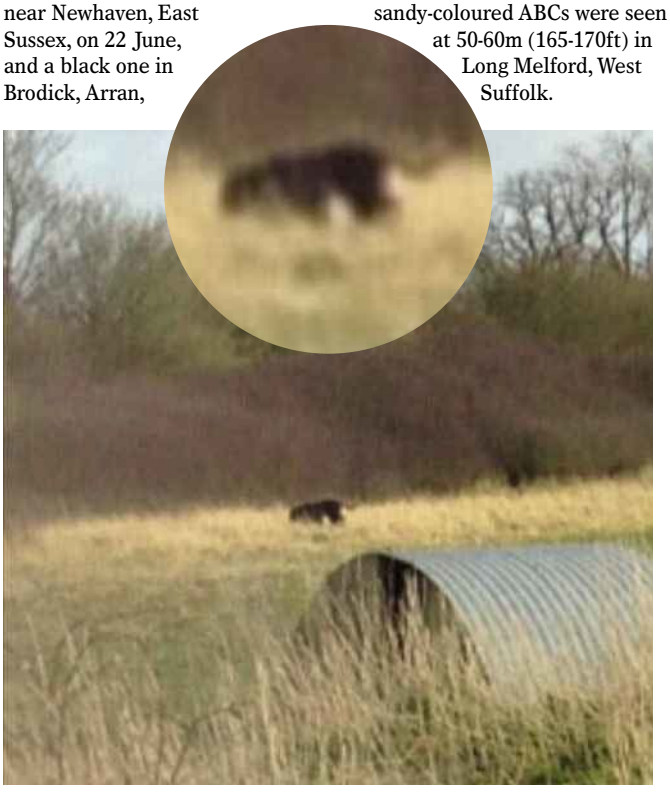
A Freedom of Information request revealed that the police received 45 ABC reports in 2013. Two were seen chasing three deer in Grimsby, one on a golf course in Berkshire, and a "black puma sitting under a tree" in North Wales. In Cumbria over five years, there were "two dozen" 999 calls reporting a giant cat with a taste for sheep – many of which were found with their heads ripped off.

2014

Lynn Lacy filmed a black ABC from her house in Great Hallingbury, Essex, on 11 March. There were sightings in Knole Park, Sevenoaks, Kent, on 26 March and again on 29 March, the same day that an ABC was photographed near Weston Rhyn, Oswestry, Shropshire, with another sighting near Highley, Shropshire, on 30 March. April saw four ABC reports in the Cleveland area: two in Stockton, one near Stockton, and one in Stillington. On 9 May Martin Hughes in Letterson, Pembrokeshire, saw a jet-black ABC at 30ft (9m), running off with a 30lb (14kg) goose in its mouth. He said it was 3.5ft (1m) tall, 4ft (1.2m) nose to tip of tail, with a large head and paws. Gwent and South Wales police had received 17 ABC reports over three years. In June came a report that Clare Balding, TV host, had seen a black ABC at the Doward, a beauty spot near Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire, at some unspecified date.

A "spotty brown" ABC was seen on Cantercrow Hill, Denton, near Newhaven, East Sussex, on 22 June, and a black one in Brodick, Arran, Firth of Clyde, Scotland, on 14 July. Arran, being an island, has limited wildlife; there is, for instance, a large population of red squirrels, as there are no grey ones and few predators. On 25 July a serval escaped from captivity in West Molesey, Surrey, was photographed in a local garden, and then caught after being cornered by a small domestic cat.

There were sightings at Whitecross, Hereford, on 27 July (plus sheep's carcase near Lugwardine); in woodland near Aberporth, Ceredigion, in August; and in Mildenhall Woods, West Suffolk, in September. An October report mentioned 10 sightings in Fife over the last two years: in Letham, Bishop Hill, Strathkinnes, Buckhaven, between Glenrothes and Kinross and in the Blairadam area of Kelty. One was seen 70 yards (64m) away near Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, on 31 October. In November, a deer carcase was found stripped bare in Billingshurst, West Sussex, possibly by a big cat; and two sandy-coloured ABCs were seen at 50-60m (165-170ft) in Long Melford, West Suffolk.



LYNN LACY

ABOVE: The black ABC filmed by Lynn Lacy from her house in Essex.

2015

In January, Dyfed-Powys police said they had received 14 ABC sighting reports since 2009 – in Telford, Oswestry, Meifod, and Llanidloes. Two big cats were seen together at Fressingfield, Suffolk, on 24 April; and on 6 August a former policewoman tending her horses in a field in Finchingfield, Essex, saw a "pony-sized" ABC at 60ft (18m). One was filmed between Ormiston and Elphinstone, East Lothian, Scotland, on 19 January.

Sighting locations included Wheeler Grove, outside Wells, Somerset, on 10 January; Midgham, West Berkshire, on 1 February, seen at 20 yards (18m), "four or five times bigger than the average cat"; off the A90 near Edzell in Angus, Scotland, in September; and Ryarsh and Offham, Kent, on 11 November. ABCs were seen in Telford, Shropshire, in March, on 23 July and on 30 September. An ABC seen at Fair Oak, Hampshire, on 10 August appeared to have left large footprints, 5in by 4in (10x13cm). In October, deer, sheep and goats were found mutilated in Romney Marsh, Kent, in a manner suggesting a big cat attack. An ABC seen from a car Bolton, Lancashire, on 10 November had a long tail, pointed ears and yellow eyes. It was said to be the "Beast of Bolton", allegedly seen since 2006.

At the beginning of July 2015, office worker Carole Desforges photographed what she took to be an ABC from her garden in Tamerton Foliot outside Plymouth, Devon. However, Chris Moiser, Director of Tropiquaria Zoo in Watchet, Somerset, thought it was a fox, while others suggested a Hungarian vizsla dog belonging to a woman who lived nearby.

CAROLE DESFORGES / SWNS.COM

ABOVE: The mystery cat photographed by Carole Desforges from her garden on the outskirts of Plymouth.

2016

January saw ABC sightings near Wickham Market, Suffolk, and in Broomfield, Essex. The latter had leopard-like markings, green eyes and no tail – and was possibly Dougal, a Bengal cat missing from Chelmsford. Within 90 minutes on some unspecified day in February, there were three Kent sightings: in Maidstone, Sevenoaks, and Canterbury. On 25 February one was seen at St Andrews in Fife. We are told that "many believe in the Balbirnie Beast, said to be on he loose around the Glenrothes area." Other Fife sightings were recorded at Saline, Leven, the Lomond Hills, Letham, Bishop Hill and Blairadam.

A big cat was seen near Ambleside in the Lake District on 12 March, and there were other sightings in Kendal, Sizergh, Natland, Brigsteer, Sedbergh, Gatebeck, Farleton, Casterton, Witherslack, Levens, and Grizedale. Police recorded 40 ABC Lake District reports since 2003. There was a sighting in Histon, Cambridgeshire, in March, and on 2 April one was seen from a car at Shackerstone, near Market Bosworth, Leicestershire. On 27 June an ABC was spotted in Ashdown Forest, East Sussex, the setting for AA Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* tales.

For those wishing to delve deeper into the subject of ABCs, we suggest reading *Mystery Big Cats* by Merrily Harpur (Heart of Albion Press, 2006) and contacting www.britishbigcats.org

SOURCES

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2016 D.Star, 16 Jan, 19 Mar; BBC News, 2 Feb; D.Mirror, 26 Feb, 22 Mar; Dundee Courier & Advertiser, 1 Mar; Cambridge News, 23 Mar; D.Express online, 2 April; Leicester Mercury, 7 April; Brighton Argus, 4 July.

NECROLOG

This issue, we take our leave of the hermit-like Leopard Man of Skye, Bermuda's unswervingly cheerful 'Mr Happy Man' and an uncannily prescient American futurologist.

LOREN HOLMES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

TOM LEPPARD

Tom Leppard was an ex-soldier who became known as the Leopard Man of Skye after he covered 99.2 per cent of his body with tattooed spots to make himself look like a big cat, and in 1987 moved to the Scottish island where he lived like a hermit in a 'cave' he built on the foundations of a ruined croft. In 2001 Leppard (whose real name has been variously listed as Woolridge, Wooldridge, Woodbridge or Woodridge), was recognised by the *Guinness Book of Records* as the most tattooed man on Earth. Although he subsequently lost that title to Lucky Diamond Rich from New Zealand, he retained the title of most tattooed male senior citizen. His entire body, apart from the insides of his ears and in between his toes, was covered in a saffron yellow design flecked with black spots. Even his eyelids were tattooed with piercing blue-green feline irises. To complete the leopard look, he had a set of fangs custom-made by a dentist. He would often be photographed with nothing on except a small pouch to preserve his modesty – except that it was also covered in leopard spots so that he gave the impression of being entirely naked. His derelict bothy beside Loch na Bèiste had no windows, electricity, heating or gas. The thatch had rotted away, and his makeshift metal sheet roof would not permit him to stand upright. He slept on a bed made from polystyrene board and cooked on a Primus stove, heating up tins of baked beans or ratatouille bought on weekly five-mile round trips by kayak to the mainland. For 20 years he coped with freezing winters and plagues of midges in summer, but he insisted that life on the island suited him well.

He lived an apparently blameless existence and, though he claimed not to like people, appeared to be remarkably popular among the locals. Therefore it came as something of a shock in 2001 when it was revealed that a self-proclaimed vampire called Manuela Ruda, aka the "Bride of Satan", then on trial for murder in Germany after sacrificing a man on an oak coffin in front of an altar of skulls, had stayed with him during a holiday in Scotland in 1996, claiming that she had been taught to worship the Devil and drink blood during her visit [**FT157:17**]. Ruda was later convicted, and Leppard was appalled by the suggestion that he might have inspired her actions. "She expressed an interest in me and told me she wanted to come and visit," he told *The Observer*. "She seemed like an ordinary teenager." He stoutly denied any Satanic proclivities, explaining that he was a Catholic who prayed for three hours every day.

Before his move to Skye, Leppard spent 28 years of his life in military service, first in the Royal Navy, which he joined aged 15, and later as a colour sergeant in the Rhodesian special forces. After leaving the military, he found it difficult to mix with ordinary people: "I decided I wanted to be the biggest of something, the only one of something. It had to be a tattoo... I thought if I get the biggest of something and live in a strange way people might pay me." The tattoos, etched on to his body over 18 months in the mid-1980s, cost £5,500. He chose leopard spots not because of an interest in cats, but because they were easy for a tattoo artist to do: "It was a necessary evil to supplement my income support, or latterly my pension." Despite his spots, Leppard felt "no affinity with leopards" and called spiritual questions about his tattoos "rubbish". In 2008, he packed all his possessions into a couple of bin bags and moved into a care home in Inverness, admitting that he was getting too old for the weekly canoe trip to collect his shopping. "I've not really got anything in common with my family," he said. "We have nothing to talk about so there's no point in meeting them."

Tom Leppard, the Leopard Man, born London or Suffolk 14 Oct 1935; died Inverness 12 June 2016, aged 80.

ALVIN TOFFLER

Toffler was an American cult sociologist who coined the term "future shock", defining it as "the shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time." His book *Future Shock*, published in 1970, is still in print, having sold 15 million copies worldwide. Much of what he predicted still seems uncannily prescient, such as gay marriage, cloning, and working from home "via computer-telecommunications hook-ups". Toffler also coined the term "information overload", arguing that, while the pace of change is accelerating, human beings' capacity to absorb the changes and adjust physically, psychologically and socially is finite. The sense of disorientation produced generates a range of symptoms, from depression and emotional disorders to "confusional breakdowns" manifested in rising crime, drug use, social alienation – and in some cases a retreat into the certainties of religious or political fundamentalism. Toffler published 13 books, many of them co-written with his wife Heidi. In *The Third Wave* (1980) he argued that the world is moving from an industrial age in which people produce things to a decentralised age in which they produce information. The old class division between bourgeoisie and proletariat is being superseded by a new antithesis between the knowledge worker and the service worker. *Powershift* (1990) focused on the increasing power of 21st century military hardware and the proliferation of new technologies. *Alvin Toffler, writer and futurist, born New York 4 Oct 1928; died Los Angeles 27 June 2016, aged 87.*

JOHNNY BARNES

Barnes was a familiar and beloved figure in Bermuda, where he was known as "Mr Happy Man" for his habit of waving cheerily at commuters every morning for 30 years from his chosen place by the Crow Lane roundabout. Each weekday without fail, into his nineties, Barnes would rise at 2am, breakfast, and by 3.45 have stationed himself besides the road into Hamilton, the island's capital. Whatever the weather, for the next six hours he would salute passers-by, shouting: "I love you – God loves you!" and blowing a kiss with his hands.

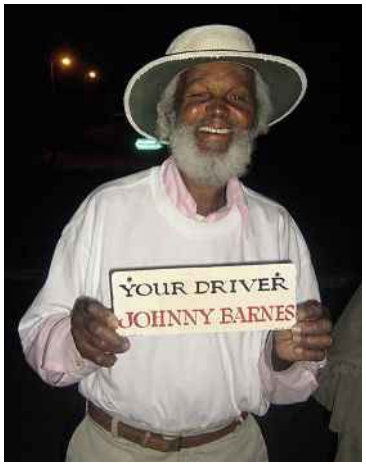
A religious man who belonged to the Seventh Day Adventist church, he was inspired by Christ's teachings on brotherly love, but was not known as a religious proselytizer. "We human beings got to learn how to love one another," he said. "Then there wouldn't be any wars, there wouldn't be any killing." Bermuda's road layout meant that most traffic entering Hamilton would pass him. Many a motorist testified that the sight of the bearded and hat-wearing Barnes bestowing benediction had lifted their mood. In 2011, the director Matt Morris was prompted to make a short film about him, *Mr Happy Man*, which has since been viewed online more than 100,000 times. "I enjoy making people happy," reflected Barnes.

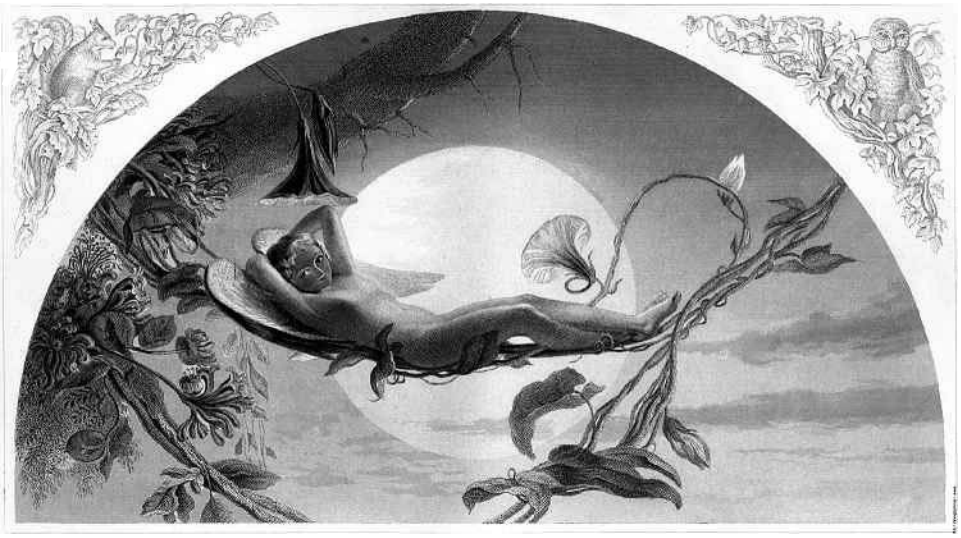
"I like to let them know that life is sweet, that it's good to be alive." In 1998, a statue of him was erected near the roundabout, paid for by local businessmen.

On the rare occasions when he failed to appear, radio stations would be deluged by callers anxious for news. In 2012 he suffered a fall while waving at his usual spot and was unable to get up until an ambulance arrived. He was provided with a bench and acknowledged that at his age it was time to take stock. Although he made no announcement of his retirement, he had not been seen at the roundabout since December after suffering trouble with his legs. Since early June this year, his place there has been taken by another islander, Dennis Bean.

Barnes was born John James Randolf Adolphus Mills to parents originally from St Kitts. He recalled his mother telling him that he was born on a Saturday and so, according to the rhyme, would have to work hard for a living. When he began work as an electrician on Bermuda's railway, he would wave at passers-by during his lunch hour. He continued this practice when he later became a bus driver after the railway closed in 1948. Bermuda's Prime Minister Michael Dunkley hailed Barnes as "a remarkable, original man whose life gave life to the love we all have in our hearts, and who, from his roundabout perch each morning, expressed that love to all who passed by – friend, acquaintance, stranger, it did not matter, because Johnny Barnes embraced the human race." He is survived by his wife Belvina, to whom he was married in 1949. There were no children.

Johnny Barnes, "Mr Happy Man", born Bermuda 23 June 1923; died Bermuda 9 July 2016, aged 93.





FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

MAPPING MONSTERS

How many supernatural creatures does your country have? Baffled? Well, there is a way to give a very, very approximate answer to that question: though anyone with a background in statistics might want to close their eyes now. Pick one area with excellent documentation, count carefully, then multiply recklessly. Over the last couple of years, I have, to try and carry out such a calculation, dug up every monster, fairy, phantom dog, boggart, and ghost in a small corner of Northern England called Saddleworth.

Saddleworth is a fabulous place to study because Saddleworthians have long been more interested in writing about their home than their neighbours. It is possible, therefore, to comb through a score of 19th- and early 20th-century books and get a credible total for the area. There are, as it happens, 40 of these bogeys tied to places in the parish, including Moss the Fairy Queen, the Waters Cote Whistler and a homicidal harridan named Jenny. That works out at 1.36 entities per square mile, and some will have escaped notice. Let's live dangerously and extrapolate. If this density were true for the whole country, then there would be about 180,000 ghouls for England, and about 330,000 for all Britain; and if we cheekily extend this over the Atlantic and forget the fact that much of the country is wilderness, about 13.5 million for the United States. The vast majority of these entities went unrecorded, of course. For every A-list Spring-heeled Jack with his bling, there was a lonely hob in Darlington, Ceredigion or Louisiana who was disenfranchised by history and 'progress'.

> FOR EVERY A-LIST SPRING-HEELED JACK WAS A LONELY HOB IN DARLINGTON OR LOUISIANA

One folklorist has suggested to me that it would make more sense to measure by population density, rather than by square miles. I disagree. The fundamental factor here is not population but landscape: not how many people there are, but how much land those people have to inhabit imaginatively. In other areas with documentation as good as Saddleworth (there are not many from Victoria's Britain), similar density levels emerge even when the population changes. These monsters are a kind of garish mental wallpaper for the places we live, be that the inner city (pub ghosts) or the moors around an isolated Highland Croft. The records that I've used are almost all from the 1800s, the golden age for monsters in print. How do we rate today? In the valley where I grew up in the 1970s, just down the road from Saddleworth, I can remember talk of three supernatural beings: which suggests a falling away from 19th-century levels. But as soon as you include UFO hotspots and ABCs the numbers pick up again. The supernatural is a constant, but the forms change from generation to generation.

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com

the UFO files

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FLYING SORCERY

PETER BROOKESMITH PRESENTS HIS REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER

I'm one who, as the Bellamy Brothers put it, "turned on to country music 'cause disco left him cold". This wasn't so hard, given that country's ancestry is in white American folk music (itself rooted in Scottish, English and Irish musics) and has many connexions with traditional Afro-American music – some of which is a good deal weirder, and more to do with hymn-singing and magic, than those familiar with only the blues might suspect. In all of which I've been interested, and even scribbled about, for many a long decade. Flying saucers didn't take long to glide into country music: the Buchanan Brothers released '(When You See) Those Flying Saucers' within a month of Kenneth Arnold's seminal July 1947 sighting. Since when, everyone from Ella Fitzgerald (honest: in 1951) through Elton John to well beyond has come up with a UFO-themed song of some kind (see **FT88:34-38, 244:30-35**). Rather more interesting, however, than ditties about little green men and purple people-eaters are songs that ostensibly aren't about UFOs at all, but are declared to be, once subjected to subtle analysis by ufological sages.

Take, for example, what passes for close reading of sundry Bob Dylan songs by Sean Casteel (www.seancasteel.com/dylan.htm), who describes himself as a 'UFO journalist'. Despite the occasional disparagements of some nuts-and-bolts saucer buffs, this is not the same thing as being a literary critic. As we see almost at once in his essay. Which tells us that the lines from 'Ten Thousand Men', "10,000 women in my room/Spilling my buttermilk/Sweeping it up with a broom" are "a fairly straightforward account of a sperm sample being taken." Really? The song is in a straightforward blues format but eschews the flat-seventh chord on the fourth that's usually used when repeating the opening line of the verse. This is less an instance of awkward-squad Dylan than calculated primitivism. The lyrics otherwise bear no more relation to alien abduction and sperm samples than do salmon fishcakes. They are a set of *seemingly* random images with a common emotional core, characteristic of the blues, but with a very funny surprise ending that is faintly redolent of early TS Eliot.

Casteel tells us: "Everyone from Harvard psychiatrist John E Mack… to… Whitley Strieber, reports that in the aftermath of the abduction experience a person is awakened in new ways to certain social issues like never before. This change in world view brings with it a huge upsurge in interest in subjects like nuclear warfare and the environmental decline of the world. A deeper concern for the planet and their fellow man than they have ever felt previously begins to take hold of them." This was no longer news donkey's years before Mack and Strieber appeared on the scene, but never mind. Then Casteel asks: "Is this a possible explanation for Dylan's extremely moralistic social and political stance and his dire warnings of doom through decadence and unrestrained wickedness?" No, old fruit, it isn't. Some have noticed that Dylan has always been religious, however convolutedly he has sometimes expressed this, with a powerfully apocalyptic tinge, as befits those whose formative years were spent in the shadow of the Bomb. Why not try the same test on Joan Baez?

H. THOMPSON / EVENING STANDARD / HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: Is Dylan's 'Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands' really about the Roswell incident? Probably not…

Flying saucers didn't take long to glide into country music

Perhaps the most bemusing of Casteel's eccentricities is that 'Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands' contains an account of the Roswell incident. He bases this scintillating insight on the lines "The farmers and the business men, they all did decide/To show you where the dead angels are that they used to hide". This is apparently "a fairly good summation" of the case, the "dead angels" being the misfortunately squidged aliens found at the scene. This is a bit much to lay on an oblique 17-minute song that, as all the cognoscenti have known since its release in 1966, was written for and about his then wife, Sarah Lowndes. Is it superfluous to mention that 'Roswell' was all but forgotten in 1966, and that the song doesn't mention the word 'saucer' anywhere at all?

BRING YOUR ALIBIS…

There are other wonders in Casteel's essay, which I urge you to peruse as an entertaining exercise in the differently logical. But then a commentator signing himself 'AJH' (http://www.inthe70s.com/generated/lyricsmeaning.shtml) has almost as quirky a take on the Eagles' 'Hotel California'. In my innocence I had always taken this to be an impressionist commentary, critique, or maybe even a satire, on life in Beverley Hills or its equivalents elsewhere. As an old friend once put it, "Having lived in Los Angeles for 10 years, I think I may claim some acquaintance with shallowness." (The Beverley Hills Hotel, its Art Deco sign obscured, is the building on the album cover. One may meet startlingly attractive women by the poolside there.) AJH starts promisingly: for the first verse might be taken as a typical prelude to an abduction: "On a dark desert highway, cool wind in my hair… Up ahead in the distance, I saw a shimmering light/My head grew heavy and my sight grew dim – I had to stop for the night." After that, it's downhill all the way for AJH's interpretation. Granted, the song's last line, "You can check out any time you like/But you can never leave", is chilling: but what alien abductor ever brought wine to his captive, and with the words "We haven't had that spirit here since 1969"?

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES MARKS THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF A CASE THAT RAISES IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

PERKS OF THE JOB

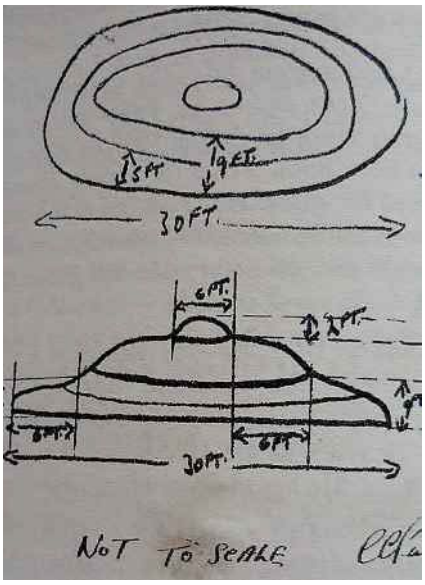
I first became interested in the 1966 case of Police Constable Colin Perks when I was the Director of Investigations for BUFORA in the 1980s and was writing up a series of case histories from the files of this national group. Unfortunately, I left the job before I was able to cover this particular case, but knew from studying the data and contacting PC Perks myself that it deserved a higher profile. This was before the Public Records Office release of the MoD case file in 1996; these Whitehall records concerning the unexpected aftermath of the case cast a dramatic new light on what we at BUFORA had previously uncovered.

Here are some extracts from the report that Police Constable Colin Perks gave to BUFORA in May 1966: *"On the night of Thursday/Friday 6/7 January 1966 – a cold clear night with a full Moon which made visibility very good – I was on a 10 pm to 6 am shift checking property at the rear of a large block of shops which are situated to the east of the A34, Alderley Road, in Wilmslow, Cheshire. At 4.10am, I heard a high-pitched whine and could not 'place' the noise, which was unfamiliar in those surroundings. I turned around and saw a green-grey glow in the sky about 100 yards [90m] from me and 35ft [11m] up in the air. The object was about the length of a bus... It was elliptical in shape and emitted the eerie greenish-grey light. It appeared to be motionless, at any rate there was no impression of rotation, and it had a flat bottom. The object remained stationary for about five seconds and then, without any change in [the pitch of] the whine, it started moving. It moved very rapidly in an ESE direction... The object was of sharp, distinctive and definite shape and of a solid substance... The glow was from the exterior and [this was] the only light visible."*

The then 28-year-old bobby checked with the Jodrell Bank radio telescope, a few miles away across Cheshire, and Manchester Airport, only three miles distant. Neither had observed anything directly or had sightings reported to them, and could offer no explanation. As a result, PC Perks told his duty sergeant, who next day informed the station superintendent. From here, it reached the Cheshire force's deputy chief constable, who was sufficiently impressed with Perks's credibility (he was vouched for by all who knew him) to submit an official report to the Air Staff office in Whitehall. Perks penned a statement and made a drawing that shows a dome-shaped object – a classic 'flying saucer' – as you can see from his signed sketch.

Curiously, given what else was hidden for the next 30 years, PC Perks was asked by his superiors to meet the press two months after his sighting – surprising in itself in this prosperous stockbroker belt town south of Manchester, today famous as the home to millionaire footballers and TV stars.

The young policeman, recently married and then with a young baby girl, explained that he had stood "paralysed" as he watched this awesome sight and "could not believe what I was seeing". He added that he had travelled



LEFT: PC Colin Perks's detailed witness sketch of what he saw on the night of 6/7 January 1966.

widely in other countries (quite rare in those days) and had "never seen anything like it". As far as 'flying saucers' were concerned he had "always been sceptical" but added that "there is no other explanation". He remarked that when he rushed back into the station the other coppers, seeing his state of shock, asked if he had seen a ghost and – when told what he *had* seen – "joked about the Daleks".

What remained unstated was something that PC Perks was asked not to disclose given his routine signing, as a police officer, of the Official Secrets Act. Air Staff at the Ministry of Defence had not merely filed and forgotten his report as they did with nearly all of those received over the years. In fact, they chose to go to some lengths to investigate and sent two field officers from one of their defence intelligence units (DI 61) to interview PC Perks, visit the site and take samples of an unidentified 'glass like' substance found there for analysis via an MoD scientist (though no answers were found).

Such unusual levels of follow-up by the defence intelligence units, who were routinely copied into countless sightings by the MoD, was not discovered until this case file was made publicly available on expiration of the 30 year rule. What these records made clear was that the effort put into this case far surpassed that expended on, for instance, Rendlesham Forest, where the same intelligence agencies made minimal effort to trace hard evidence that they already knew to exist.

This poses interesting questions about why the PC Perks sighting was given such unusual levels of respect – and why such diligent official investigation was kept out of the public eye via the OSA. Questions such as: were the MoD aware of something interesting about this sighting that we still do not know today – such as tracking of it, perhaps, by military radar? Or, especially considering the other case I refer to earlier, was such a level of subsequent on-site investigation truly as rare as we have been led to believe? Or does it happen more often, only to be covered up on grounds of secrecy as here – perhaps even from front desk MoD UFO staff.

I have been told over and over by those MoD staff that on-site visits to witnesses, such as that reported here, did not happen. But I have followed up quite a few UK cases where, according to the witnesses, they did take place. When I asked about these events it was suggested to me that such reported visitors (for instance the two men who interviewed Jim Templeton after taking the Burgh Marshes 'spaceman photo' in 1964; see **FT196:29, 286:28-9, 305:28**) must have been rogue UFO buffs pretending to be from the Ministry.

Well, we know that was not the case with the two men who visited PC Perks in 1966, and I suspect this may be true in many other cases – especially as there are files that we know were followed up by the MoD but that have never been released, decades later. Just where are they?

The defence intelligence unit follow-up in Wilmslow in 1966 occurred on 1 February, just three weeks after Perk's sighting – quicker than the MoD reacted to the Rendlesham Forest case. Perks was intelligently quizzed about many details of his UFO sighting, in the same way other witnesses have described to me their visits from self-professed 'agents'.

BUFORA's 1966 investigation – obviously unaware of this sequel – decided that the UFO was possibly a fireball meteor, which seemed sensible. BUFORA did, however, receive a report from a second nearby witness describing the same object as Perks, and taken together these reports did not easily fit a meteor.

When I was first analysing these files for BUFORA I changed their initial evaluation from 'meteor' to 'currently unknown'; and that was even before the MoD files appeared to further justify such a cautious conclusion. I did note that PC Perks had mentioned the presence of an electricity sub-station behind the cinema over which his UFO had first hovered. He said that the whine the UFO made was not the same as the humming from this building, but thought it might be a clue about some kind of atmospheric electrical discharge or ionisation of the air that night. Perhaps it was.

The MoD failed to explain this sighting, but tried harder than in any case we have on record. Indeed, their files conclude: "*There is no reason to doubt that this constable saw something completely foreign to his previous experience*". Carefully worded, yet reaching just the conclusion that UFO researchers have tried to persuade the MoD of concerning a small residue of close encounters for decades. Sadly the MoD never seemed willing to offer support for this view in public. Though in private they seem to have arrived at it by themselves...

This case reveals that when Whitehall takes a UFO case seriously and investigates it properly it reaches similar conclusions to the UFO community. I find that comforting because it suggests that we have been on the right track after all.

DAGG'S DEMON

PAUL CROPPER and TONY HEALY revisit a classic Canadian haunting – the Shawville Spook of 1889. The talking entity turned the Dagg family's lives upside down and the episode caused controversy, but this remains one of the best documented poltergeist cases ever recorded.

"I am the devil: I'll have you in my clutches: get out of this or I'll break your neck!"

Percy Woodcock was astonished. The voice, deep and gruff like that of an old man, seemed to come out of thin air. Standing beside him was the adopted daughter of the farm's owner, but Woodcock was certain she was not the source of the sinister words. So who – or what – was threatening him?

Percy Franklin Woodcock, accomplished artist and enthusiastic spiritualist, [1] had arrived at the Dagg farm outside Shawville, Quebec, in November 1889 in response to tales of baffling phenomena that had commenced two months earlier. The story had appeared in the Canadian media and in American papers as far away as New York. The case would eventually become one of Canada's best-known hauntings: the Dagg Poltergeist.

The brief but very intense episode featured almost every previously recorded poltergeist behaviour: displacement of objects, inexplicable stone throwing, spontaneous fires, written messages, vivid apparitions and strange vocalisations. The mind-boggling case was thoroughly investigated and reinvestigated, and extremely well documented. It remains one of the most impressive poltergeist episodes on record.

LEFT: Percy Woodcock, who conducted an investiagtion of events at the Dagg farm, photographed in 1879.

MEET THE DAGGS

George Henry Dagg's farm was located in Clarendon, a community seven miles (11km) from Shawville in southern Quebec and a few miles north of the Ottawa River. Set amidst a vast forest of pine, the area was home to a mixed community of French Canadian and Irish families. Ireland's deteriorating economy, rising religious tensions and a British policy of actively encouraging Canadian settlement triggered a wave of Protestant emigrants to move to eastern Canada in the early 1800s. Between 1818 and 1840, at least 12 members of the Dagg family emigrated from Modreeny Parish, Tipperary. Some, including George's father, John D Dagg, settled in the fertile Ottawa River valley.

George's home, a single-storey, three-room log cabin with attic, was humble, but comfortable. There was also a small outside shed. The family was made up of George (35), his wife Susan, daughters Mary (5), Eliza Jane (4) [2] and son Johnny (2). Occasionally present at the farm was young Dean, an orphan who helped the Daggs with their chores. George's parents, John and Mary, lived two miles away.

In 1885, the Daggs had adopted a nine-year-old Glasgow orphan, Dina Burden Maclean, [3] from a placement home called "Marchmont" in Belleville. (see "Deconstructing Dina" overleaf). While many orphans ended up as little more than indentured servants, Dina was well treated by the Daggs. Soon after her arrival she wrote to her mother to say she was in a good home and very happy. Just four years later, however, her world would be ripped apart.

JOHNNY CRIED OUT THAT SOMETHING WAS PULLING HIS HAIR

SMEARS AND SQUEALS

The first suggestions of the supernatural took place on 15 September 1889. [4] On that day, George had given his wife a five dollar

ABOVE: The Dagg farmhouse outside Shawville, Quebec, as it appears today. **BELOW:** Shawville's Main Street, photographed in 2006.

and a two dollar bill, which she placed in a bureau drawer. Later that day, young Dean found the five dollar bill lying on the floor, and took it straight to Mr Dagg. Suspicious, George checked the drawer and found the two dollar bill was also missing. A search eventually located it – under Dean's bed. Later that same day, Susan Dagg returned home to find a wide, ugly streak of excrement smeared right through the house.

This was too much. Prime suspect Dean was taken from the house and placed before a Shawville magistrate. Fortunately for him – but unfortunately for the disbelieving Daggs – the strange events continued, with human filth again thrown throughout the house. Completely exonerated, Dean was released but, understandably, never returned to the farm.

A day or two later, all hell broke loose. While George was away and his father watched over the family, a window pane suddenly shattered. Certain that someone was playing tricks, John hid outside and watched helplessly as windows continued to be smashed by flying stones. One flew through an open door and struck young Mary squarely in the chest. Curiously, she was not injured at all. Fires then broke out spontaneously all over the house, burning curtains and other objects – as many as eight in a day. Dishes were broken and a pitcher of water was splashed into the elder Mrs Dagg's face while she was alone in the house.

The devilry became increasingly personal.

One afternoon, Dina felt her hair being pulled by an unseen hand. Her cries brought the entire family, who found her braid almost shorn off. On the same day, young Johnny cried out that something was pulling his hair, and his mother observed that his mop-top had been mown in rough chunks.

Not satisfied with its hellish haircuts, the spook made its presence even more forcefully felt. As the elder Mrs Dagg was making up one of the bedrooms, young Dina cried out: "Oh, Grandmother! See the big black thing pulling off the bedclothes!" Mary turned to see the sheets being pulled up as if something had grabbed them in the middle. "Where is it Dina?" she asked. Dina told her it was leaning over the bedstead. Mary picked up a nearby whip stock and encouraged young Dina to lay into the invisible imp. She struck a few times, and they all heard a sound like a squealing pig, just as Dina exclaimed that the figure had disappeared.

Outraged by the ass-whipping, the astral agitator redoubled its mischief. Slats were removed from a bed and a framed motto ripped from a wall. One of the slats was later seen pounding the motto on one of the beds. A mouth organ lying on a shelf began playing and was thrown violently across a room, and an empty chair began rocking furiously. It seems it took a while for the polt's ectoplasmic butt to stop smarting, because some days later a piece of paper bearing the message "You gave me fifteen cuts" was found pinned to a wall.

ANGEL, DEVIL, COW-MAN, DOG

Then things took an even stranger turn. Young Mary saw something in the shape of a man, but with horns and cloven hooves, standing in the doorway. Later, when she again saw the fiend, this time dressed in white, putting sugar in the oven, he asked if she'd like to go to Hell with him. Dina claimed to have encountered the same terrifying figure and, on another occasion, rushed breathlessly into the house, crying that she'd seen a big black dog with long hair "like tails" lurking outside the house. The adults never experienced those visions.

With the house in an uproar and the tykes in a tizzy, it was time for some serious prayer. A Mr Horner led a meeting at the house, reading from a Bible placed on a chair directly in front of him. As he was in mid-prayer, however, the good book vanished, only to be found later in the oven. Then an

THORFINN STAINFORTH

inkstand repeatedly disappeared from the kitchen and reappeared in the outside shed. Even when the rattled Reverend kept it under continuous surveillance it vanished right before his eyes.

For a while hitherto innocuous potatoes became feared missiles. When Mrs Dagg, a bottle of vinegar in hand, said she was afraid to put it down in case it was broken, someone (or *something*) was listening: no sooner had she spoken than a large potato flew across the room and struck her hand. Many years later, in 1957, a neighbour, Charlie Harris, reminisced that when, as a 15-year-old, he'd looked into a bedroom at the Dagg house, he'd been struck by a hat with a potato in it.[5]

The phenomenon then evolved once again. Some time previously, Dina claimed that she'd heard a strange, gruff voice that followed her about and used obscene language. Now, it began to be audible to other members of the family. The Voice – as they dubbed it – was here to stay. The bizarre events became the talk of the county, and soon there were crowds of 200-300 people at the farm all day and well into the night.

LEFT: The 83-year-old Charlie Harris shows where he was struck by a spud thrown by the Shawville Spook.

One reporter who visited spent a day talking to the family and interviewing other eyewitnesses. One local man, James Quinn, told him that after taking a horse to pasture, he'd dropped in on the Daggs to enjoy the show:

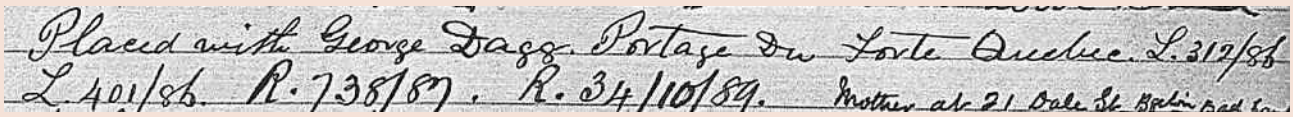
"I had a halter in my hand... and before going into the house I laid it on the doorstep. After chatting with the family a few minutes I found [it]... was gone. I thought someone had hidden it for a joke... As I was standing in front of the house... we suddenly heard a slight noise in the air, and the halter fell down in our midst." Although Dina was away with her adoptive grandfather that day, the reporter noted that the strange events seemed more intense when she was around. His final view was to be echoed by many others over the next few weeks and months: "I went there decidedly sceptical and prepared to show my rural friends how they had been hoaxed and befooled (sic). I failed... and came away perplexed in the extreme." [6]

"I'M AN ARTIST – AND I'M HERE TO HELP"

Of all the people the Daggs felt they needed at that point, an impressionist painter was probably fairly low on the list; but

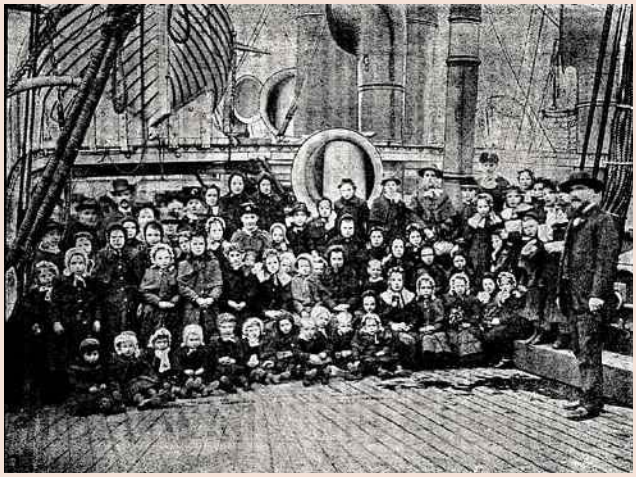
DECONSTRUCTING DINA

Dina Maclean was one of thousands of British children sent across the Atlantic to Canada in the hope of a better life



Dina Burden Maclean was one of over 100,000 children transported from the orphanages, workhouses and streets of Britain to Canada between 1863 and 1939 under the Child Immigration Scheme. The programme was an attempt by well-intentioned philanthropists to address endemic poverty and homelessness and provide the chance of a better life in a new land. In many unfortunate cases, the orphans were used as cheap farm labour. In others, the children enjoyed the genuine acceptance and love of new families.

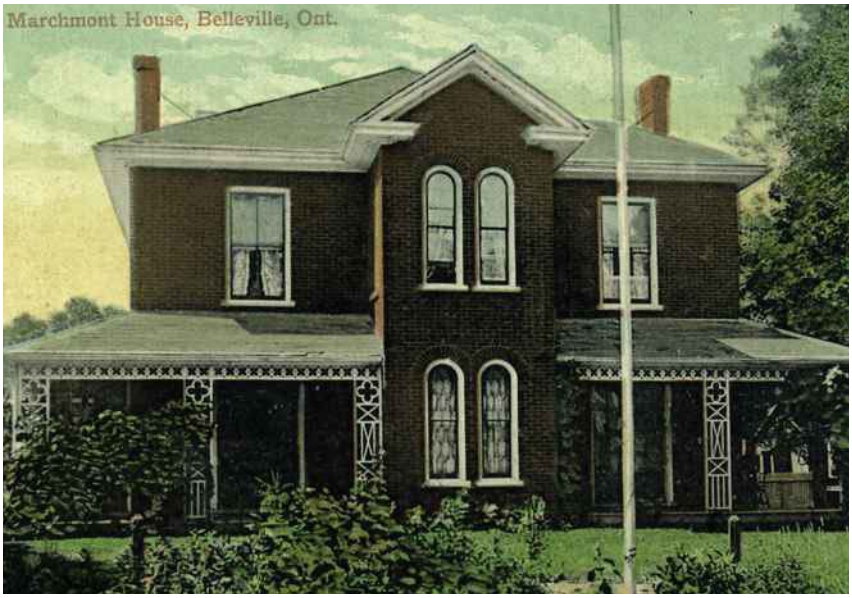
We were able to trace Dina back to the Quarrier's, previously Orphan Homes of Scotland, in the UK and, surprisingly, their records contained a wealth of material about her. She was born in Glasgow on 18 December 1876 to mother Jane Cochran and father Lachlan. When Lachlan died in 1879, unmarried Jane was left with three children, the youngest of whom died. Dina's brother John Hector was placed with an aunt, and she and her mother moved for a time into the Govan Poorhouse in Merryflats.



TOP: UK orphanage records showing Dina's placement with the Daggs in 1886. **ABOVE LEFT:** Orphans on the *SS Siberian*, June 1885. Dina Maclean may be one of the young girls pictured. **ABOVE RIGHT:** She was just one of over 100,000 orphans sent to Canada from Britain between 1863 and 1939.

Their situation became even more desperate. Dina's orphanage file notes that in 1883 that mother and daughter had "for some weeks been lying on some straw on Mrs McArthur's floor". In April 1885, having contracted whooping cough and measles, Dina was admitted to the City Orphan Home in James Morrison Street, Glasgow, before being transferred to the Girls Home at Elmpark.

Unable to find work, Jane agreed to one of the few lifelines available for her eight-year-old daughter – emigration to Canada. With the papers signed, Dina sailed on 13 June 1885, on board the *SS Siberian*, one of 140 girls destined for the Marchmont House at Belleville, Quebec. She was placed with the Dagg family later that same year. Jane must have missed Dina terribly. A file note states that in 1888 she was "very anxious to go to Canada". She never got the chance, dying in Scotland in 1894.



ABOVE LEFT: Elizabeth Barnes, sometimes known as the Witch of Plum Hollow; George Dagg sought her help in explaining the frightening events that were afflicting his family.
ABOVE RIGHT: Marchmont House, Belleville, Ontario, where the young Dina was placed before being rehomed with the Dagg family in 1885.

Percy Woodcock, artist and member of the American Society for Psychic Research, was keen to investigate the weird events firsthand. When he arrived at the farm on Saturday 14 November he asked young Dina if she'd seen anything recently, and she replied that she had heard The Voice only a few minutes earlier, near the shed. They walked together to the spot, where he was promptly abused and threatened by the astral agitator: "I am the Devil: I'll have you in my clutches: get out of this or I'll break your neck!" Recovering from his amazement, Woodcock told The Voice it should be ashamed of using such language in front of a child, but the rebuke simply triggered a further torrent of curses.

Having been told of the written messages, Woodcock placed paper and pencil on a bench and invited the spook to write. At first it refused, but then, in front of his incredulous eyes, the pencil stood up and proceeded to write another nasty note. Woodcock examined the message and, shocked at its crudity, said: "I asked you to write something decent". The Voice replied "I'll steal your pencil!". The pencil then rose from the bench and was flung violently across the shed, leaving the young impressionist quite (ahem) impressed.

Woodcock's conversation with The Voice continued for almost five hours. At one point, to rule out ventriloquism, he asked Dina to fill her mouth with water. That, however, had no effect on The Voice, which remained clearly audible to everyone in the room. Although it sounded like a gruff old man, the spook's attitude – rude, petulant and mischievous – was more like that of a nasty, dim-witted child.

Interestingly, not everyone was convinced that The Voice was totally independent of Dina. Charlie Harris, who'd been smitten by the spud, heard the Voice yell: "Get out of here, Charlie Harris, you sneak, out!" [7] He believed the voice was Dina's.

"I AM THE DEVIL! GET OUT OF THIS OR I'LL BREAK YOUR NECK!"

WIDOW WALLACE AND THE WITCH OF PLUM HOLLOW

Sometime before Woodcock's arrival, George Dagg had sought the counsel of a local woman, Elizabeth Barnes, who was reputed to have the power of second sight (see 'The Witch of Plum Hollow' overleaf). Barnes told him his problems were caused by "black art" that was being practised by a woman, a boy and a girl who lived close by. The obvious suspect was the recently widowed Mrs Wallace, the mother of two children, Maggie and Willie, who had an ongoing dispute with the Daggs over a common boundary line. The Voice appeared to be aware of this and under questioning repeated Barnes's claims:

Percy: "What are your reasons for thus persecuting the Dagg family?"

Voice: "Mrs. Wallace sends me."

Percy: "Will your engagement with Mrs Wallace soon cease?"

Voice: "Won't tell you. Shut up; you meddle with the Black Art. I will break your neck, for I'm the Devil, the son of the blessed!"

After further accusations about the Wallaces, The Voice cried out:

"George, I like you. I'll talk to you, not to him [Percy]."

George: "Why have you been bothering me and my family?"

Voice: "Just for fun."

George: "It was not very much fun when you threw a stone and struck little Mary."

Voice: "Poor wee Mary. I didn't mean to hit her. I intended it for Dina, but I didn't let it hurt her."

George: "If it was only for fun, why did you try and set the house on fire?"

Voice: "I didn't, the fires were always in the daytime, when you could see them."

The Voice's responses – the wild mood changes, the insincere apologies, even the claim that it was all "just for fun" – are strikingly reminiscent of the mischievous, muddled messages conveyed by other talking poltergeists such as the Coalbaggie Bogey and the Enfield Poltergeist.

The many people who have been hit, but not hurt, by stones at other poltergeist sites almost always remark that the impact was strangely gentle. So it is interesting that The Voice claimed it "didn't let" the stone hurt little Mary.

It is very interesting, also, that it said it lit all of the small fires "in the daytime, when you could see them", because it didn't intend to burn the house down. The mysterious fires that one of the authors investigated at Kota Bharu, Malaysia and Siirt, Turkey, (see **FT281:40-44, 302:42-45**) also occurred mainly in daylight and were easily discovered before they spread. The same pattern, in fact, has been evident in several other cases throughout the centuries. It seems highly unlikely, to say the least, that young Dina, stuck out there in rural Quebec, could she have known of such things.

SWAN SONG

Woodcock decided to test The Voice's claims about Mrs Wallace. As night fell, he visited her and, after some cajoling, persuaded her to return with him to the Dagg property, where The Voice immediately accused her and her children of buying a "black arts" book that they then hid in a swamp. Mrs Wallace denied it all, and the heated dialogue continued for some time until The Voice finally exclaimed: "Oh! Don't bother me so much! You make me lie!" It was further

ABOVE: Crowds of hundreds of people would gather outside the Dagg farm in the hope of hearing The Voice.

cross-examined by Woodcock, George Dagg and various others that Saturday night, at last announcing it would say its final goodbye on the following evening.

Word rapidly spread that The Voice had announced its supernatural swan-song, and crowds began gathering early Sunday morning and continued to grow throughout the day. The Voice was in fine form, answering questions and commenting on those who entered the room. It now claimed: "I am an angel from Heaven, sent by God to drive away that fellow". One visitor stood up and asked if it would answer a question. On hearing its response the man turned and told the crowd that no human being could have answered the question, as it related to a conversation between himself and his daughter – on her deathbed.

While the crowd was convinced of its heavenly origin, Woodcock certainly wasn't, telling the awed listeners that the "angel's" voice was the same one that had proclaimed itself the Devil only the day before. Further questions made The Voice again lose its temper, and its language again turned foul. Woodcock's scepticism was well founded. If there is one universal truth about poltergeists, it's that you can't believe a word of what they tell you. On a previous occasion The Voice had claimed to be the spirit of a man who had died, aged 80, some 20 years earlier. He gave his name to George and Willie Dagg, but forbade them to tell anyone else.

During the evening, Woodcock prepared an affidavit of events at the house, and had the paper signed by 17 respected local men. Satisfied that he had strong documented evidence, he left the house around 10.30pm. In doing so, unfortunately, he missed the spook's most impressive performance.

First The Voice called for two local clergymen, but the crowd instead sent for the Reverend Bell, a Baptist minister from further afield. As he arrived The Voice called out his name, prompting the rattled Reverend to announce that he would not speak to an evil spirit; whereupon The Voice called him a coward, accusing him of being "all words". When Bell tried commanding the demon to depart, it merely laughed and said he'd better stick to photography.

ANGELIC SINGING

After Bell's hasty departure, The Voice cried out: "You don't believe that I am an angel because my voice is coarse. I will show you I don't lie, but always tell the truth". Instantly its voice took on an "incredible sweetness", and it commenced singing a hymn:

"I am waiting, I am waiting, to call you dear sinner,
Come to the savior, come to him now,
Won't you receive Him right now, right now,
Oh! List, now he is calling today,
He is calling you to Jesus, move!
Come to Him now,
Come to Him, dear brothers and sisters, Come to Him now."

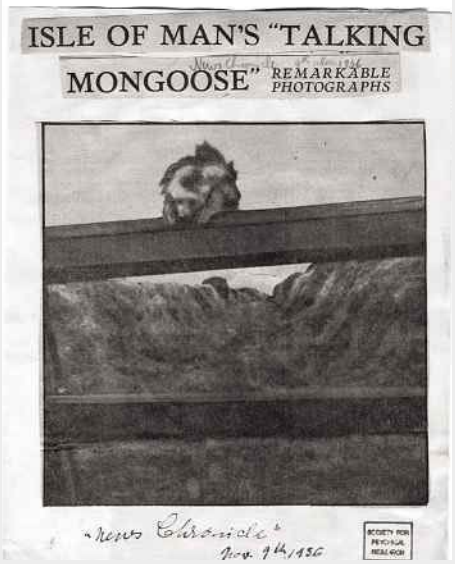
Sweet – but given the circumstances, downright creepy. All agreed it was most beautifully sung, and at The Voice's request a Miss Mary Smart sang along. Although she had an excellent voice, it sounded rough compared to that of the angel/demon. The spectral singalong stirred the crowd to an emotional fever pitch, with many of the women reduced to tears. At three in the morning, The Voice bade them all farewell, saying it would return the next morning and show itself to young Dina, Mary and little Johnny.

Woodcock returned on Monday morning to say goodbye to the Daggs. As he sat preparing his notes and talking to the family, the three children ran in wild-eyed and breathless. Little Mary cried: "Oh Mamma, the beautiful man, he took little Johnny and me in his arms… he went to Heaven and was all red." Under questioning, the girls described a man dressed in white, with ribbons and "pretty things" all over his clothes, and a gold object with stars on his head. He had a lovely face with long white hair. The beatific being had stooped down and picked up Mary and baby Johnny, saying Johnny was a fine young fellow. He even let Mary play with a harp he

THE WITCH OF PLUM HOLLOW

Canadian folklore is full of stories of witches and witchcraft. In "The Baldoon Mystery" (**FT315:30-39**), the authors outlined the story of an early Ontario poltergeist episode that had been ascribed to a vengeful local witch. The Dagg case also involved suggestions of witchcrft, when George Dagg consulted Jane Elizabeth Barnes – "The Witch of Plum Hollow".

Jane Barnes was born around 1794 in County Cork, Ireland, and it was said she was the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, a traditional requisite for psychic abilities. She emigrated to Canada and in 1843 moved to Sheldon's Corner, near Plum Hollow. She became well known as a fortune-teller throughout Canada and was reputed to never charge more than 25 cents for her advice. She lived into her 90s and was buried in an unmarked grave in the Shadows Corner cemetery. Her cabin, at one time derelict but since restored, might even be turned into a museum according to some reports.



WHEN SPOOKS SPEAK

The weirdest of all the weird things that can happen during poltergeist episodes is when the invisible entities decide, as at Shawville, to provide an audible, creepy commentary. The phenomenon occurs only very rarely: in Paul Cropper's extensive Australian file there is only one instance of a talkative polt – the very chatty "Coalbaggie Bogey" (who also enjoyed a good old sing-song: see *Australian Poltergeist*, Tony Healy and Paul Cropper. Strange Nation, Sydney, 2014).

Two famous British cases, Gef the Talking Mongoose in the 1930s (see **FT269:32-40**) and Enfield in 1977 (see **FT32:47-48, 33:4-5, 229:58-59, 288:18-19** et al), involved vocalisations. In both instances, as with the Daggs, the voices were male, and their messages rude, contradictory and confused. During the Bell Witch episode (Tennessee, 1817-1821) the "Witch", too, was often foul-mouthed and nasty. It employed four voices – two masculine, two "delicate and feminine" – and occasionally broke into song.

In Enfield, scientific measurements showed the voice was clearly being made by Janet Hodgson's false vocal chords, but debate continues as to whether she had any control over the messages produced. While Dina, like Janet, may have been the physical agent for The Voice, the authors believe she was not consciously responsible for its messages. How could the child have coordinated a commentary with the pencil's gyrations as seen by Woodcock, or obtained the knowledge required to repeat a deathbed discussion involving a complete stranger? To us, the mystery of The Voice remains.

was holding. An angel straight out of central casting!

Dina said he had spoken to her as well, telling her that Woodcock thought he was not an angel, but he would show he was. Then he had "gone up to Heaven". Questioned further, she said he seemed to rise up in the air and disappear in a kind of fire that blazed from his feet. No amount of questioning could shake the children's report. In any case, the Shawville Spook appears – finally – to have been as good as its word: its "ascension into Heaven" was the last recorded action of the Daggs's uncanny, and most unwelcome, guest.

Not long afterwards young Dina was temporarily bundled off to George's father's house. It was probably for the best. While the manifestations were relatively short-lived, the media accounts had created a storm of controversy right across eastern Canada. Opinion was sharply divided between those who felt the stories were true and those (including editor of the local Bryson *Equity*) who believed that, somehow, young Dina was able to move objects, set fires, fake both the gruff Voice and the angelic singing, and fool hundreds of eyewitnesses.

MR GRANT INVESTIGATES

Percy Woodcock returned to Shawville 10 days after his initial visit, accompanied by Andrew Watson, an agent of the Royal Oil Company of Toronto. Although Dina was still absent, Watson spoke to the family, neighbours and other witnesses. He later wrote to Woodcock: "I went there with the certainty of finding proof that this whole thing was a fraud, but I found nothing… The question remains: 'Who then was behind it?' Some say it is Dinah. I do not think so. I do not see how Dinah could reverse sofas, tables or beds or play the ventriloquist for two months… who in the past five years has never exhibited any talent in that direction. As I already mentioned, [the Daggs's] reputation is spotless and I refuse to believe that they could commit this kind of scam, a fraud, [which] if it was discovered, could send them to prison." [8]

In November 1890, Robert Grant, Principal of the local Brockville Public School, decided to reinvestigate the case. He had keenly followed the original reports and, as he was a well known local resident, felt he was in an excellent position to get to the truth. In a letter to Percy Woodcock, he provided a detailed account of his visit and his interviews with key participants.

One witness who particularly impressed him was well respected local farmer, Mr Arthur Smart:

"He sat in front of a little cupboard, at a distance of not more than four or five feet… and saw Mrs Dagg put in two pans full of bread which she had just taken from the oven. After so doing she took a pail and went out to milk, while he continued to sit facing the cupboard. In about 10 minutes Mrs Dagg, on coming in with her milk, found one of the pans full of bread out in the back kitchen, and on expressing her surprise he opened the cupboard, and found only one there. This, he said, was the first thing that fairly staggered his unbelief of the presence of the invisible."

LEFT: James Burges, Director of the Fairknowe Orphans Home, where Dinah was sent.

On another occasion Smart heard a match fall to the floor, "…which was uncarpeted, then another and another, and this continued till the floor of the room was pretty well covered. Mr Smart watched with all care possible to see if he could see the matches leaving the safe, which hung against the wall, but failed to see them, nor could he see them till within a few inches of the floor…"

Grant asked Mrs Dagg if she had ever seen anything actually move at the house.

"Yes", she replied, "quite often… One day just after dinner I and Dinah were standing at the window on the side of the room opposite to where the dining-table stands, when we saw it slowly turning over towards her till it fell on one side. It then made a second turn and lay with its legs pointing to the ceiling. This occurred at about one o'clock p.m. on a clear, sunny day, when no one was near except myself and family."

Grant examined the table, which was very heavy and strongly-built, about 8ft long and 3.5ft wide. He also noted that Mrs Dagg was quite aware of the controversy the case had generated, and very upset by accusations of hoaxing: "She answered, with tears in her eyes, that she knew that, and that was all she was sorry about. She said she was sorry to find people so much to warp the facts, and to blame her. If they would only tell the truth she would not care."

Grant ended his letter to Woodcock with: "I went, like many others, hoping to find a clue to unravel the mystery, but came away more at sea than ever, and fully satisfied that unless the Spiritualists can explain it, no others can." [9]

THE POLTERGEIST GIRLS HOME

After Woodcock's departure, the Daggs, at their wits end, decided enough was enough. Dina was packed up and sent to the Fairknowe Orphans Home in Brockville. That

was cruel, but understandable. The Home's Director, James Burges, kept her in strict seclusion, not even allowing a physician to see her. A representative of the American Psychical Research Society tried to arrange a visit, without success. According to Percy Woodcock, while Burges publicly declared there was no truth to the events at Shawville, in private he was telling friends it was likely the work of spirits, or the Devil, but the home, being dependent on charitable funding, would have suffered if it became known that he believed in such things. [10]

We were very interested to discover that Dina was not the only "poltergeist girl" to pass through Fairknowe's doors. One year later, in November 1891, a farmer in Thorah, Ontario, experienced a series of mysterious fires centered around another "Belleville" orphan, 14-year-old Jennie Bramwell. The outbreaks started after Jennie fell seriously ill, and for the next few weeks fires, sometime 50 in a day, broke out all over the house without any obvious cause. (Sound familiar?) The blazes continued until Jennie was sent back to Fairknowe, where, despite his private suspicions, Director Burges again told the press there was no way the young orphan could possibly have had any connection with the strange manifestations. [11]

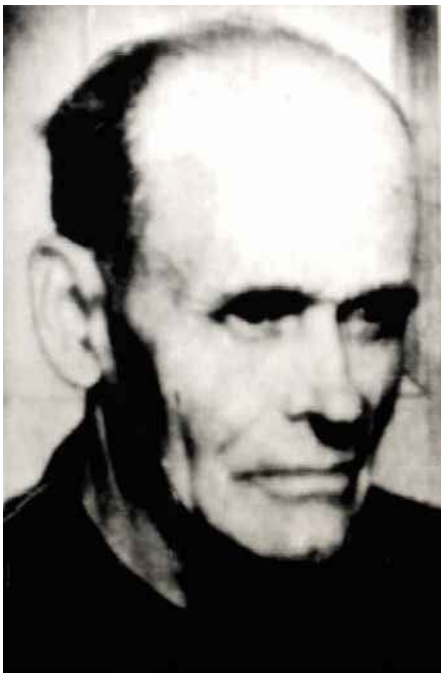
Did Dina McLean and Jennie Bramwell ever meet? Jennie had been placed with her family before Dina arrived in Canada, but if Dina was still at Fairknowe when Jennie was sent back there in late 1891 they may well have encountered each other. We know of no other occasion where two poltergeist mediums – "poltergeist girls", as Fort called them – were in a position to meet and compare notes. Their conversations would certainly have been interesting to hear. We imagine that they would, at least, have agreed that Director Burges was a fool.

After Dina's departure, the Daggs's lives returned to normal. They had seven more children, and in 1905 moved a few miles to a larger home in Calmut Road. But although the spook never returned, the Daggs were soon to experience another kind of pain: in 1917 one of their sons, William Alfred, died with the Canadian infantry at Vimy Ridge.

George's reputation didn't suffer because of the weird events at Shawville. Widely respected, he was voted councillor, and then Mayor, of Portage du Fort, a position he held for 33 years until his death, at the age of 80, in 1938. As the *Ottawa Citizen* noted in its obituary: "George Dagg was… a charitable individual… identified with every community service organisation in Portage and his death will cause widespread regret." [12]

STILL DIVIDED

Interest in the case resurfaced in 1955, when RS Lambert included a chapter on the Dagg case in his excellent summary of strange Canadian cases, *Exploring the Supernatural*. In 1957, inspired by Lambert's account, the National Film Board of Canada produced a short film on the case titled *The Ghost That Talked*. That same year, a piece in the *Ottawa Citizen* showed the passage of time had not



ABOVE: Thomas Dagg, son of George and Susan, remained convinced that the poltergeist episode "was the work of the Devil".

settled opinions on the matter, with various locals claiming either that Dinah was a ventriloquist or that the Daggs had hoaxed the events.

The much-put-upon family, however, continued to reject such allegations. In 1957, 64-year-old Thomas Dagg, son of George and Susan, remained adamant that the uncanny episode "was the work of the Devil". And in June 2014, Paul Cropper spoke with 93-year-old Mrs Alma Gatien of Thunder Bay, a granddaughter of George and Susanna, who, while unable to add further details, confirmed the family's view that the story was absolutely true.

Dina's final whereabouts remain unknown. Her Quarrier's file has one final notation in 1917, indicating there had been a request for copies of her birth papers. The most likely – and happiest – explanation for the request is that, at the age of 41, she was getting married. If that was the case, we can only hope that her married life was free of the paranormal pranks that plagued her as a young girl.

In their article on the 'Baldoon Mystery' (**FT315:30-39**) Paul Cropper and Christopher Laursen discussed another remarkable Canadian poltergeist episode – the "Baldoon Mystery" of 1829 – which had many elements in common with the Dagg case: a well-respected farming family at the centre of events, the displacement of objects, inexplicable fires, mysterious stone throwing, strange black dogs, allusions to witchcraft and neighbourhood land disputes.

In our opinion, the Dagg case, like Baldoon, featured genuine poltergeist activity, focused on young orphan Dina. Claims that she simply faked the events are relatively easy to dismiss. It is almost impossible to imagine over the course of three months that a 12 year old girl could:

- Arrange the stone throwing, making herself a target without being badly hurt.
- Set many fires without being discovered.
- Make the pencil Percy Woodcock observed rise and write on its own.
- Fake a gruff male voice for many hours over many days, sometimes with her mouth full of water, then shift to angelic singing without missing a beat.
- Have access to the "secret knowledge" (the deathbed conversation) the voice demonstrated.
- Flip the large, heavy table, as observed by Mrs Dagg.
- Move the bread and cause the matches to fall as seen by Mr Smart.

As to reports that the Dagg family was somehow involved, Woodcock, Watson, Grant and others all agreed that the family was held in high regard. George Dagg's succession of local government positions also indicates that his honesty and integrity were never in question. The Dagg episode, like Baldoon before it, remains a baffling mystery. It is one of the very best poltergeist cases on record. FT

NOTES

1 Woodcock would later become one of the founders of the Bahai Faith in Canada.

2 Eliza Jane Dagg's gravestone at the Portage Du Fort Protestant Cemetery states she died on 9 October 1889 – just three weeks after the haunting commenced! Surprisingly, neither Woodcock's nor any of the other contemporary accounts mention her demise. Unconfirmed sources suggest she was burned to death when her clothes caught fire near a pot of soap that was boiling (*Ottawa Citizen*, 9 Apr 1957).

3 Often incorrectly rendered as Dinah. Her Quarriers file records her name consistently as Dina.

4 While there are many version of the Dagg Poltergeist story in circulation, the authors consider the detailed reports in the *Brockville Recorder and Times* of Ontario the most complete contemporaneous account.

5 *Ottawa Citizen,* 9 Apr 1957.

6 *New York Herald*, 12 Jan 1890.

7 *Ottawa Citizen,* 9 Apr 1957.

8 Brockville *Recorder and Times*, quoted in RS Lambert, *Exploring the Supernatural: The Weird in Canadian Folklore*, Ch6, p120. (McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, 1955).

9 *Light*, No 516-Vol X, London, 22 Nov 1890, p568.

10 Ibid, p567.

11 *Toronto World*, Nov 1891, as quoted in John Robert Colombo, *The Big Book of Canadian Hauntings.*

12 *Ottawa Citizen* (Ottawa, Ontario), 30 May, 1938.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

PAUL CROPPER and **TONY HEALY** have been regular contributors to *FT* for many years. Since the 1970s they have invesigated all manner of strange phenomena and have a particular passion for polts. They are the co-authors of *Out of the Shadows – Mystery Animals of Australia* (1994), *The Yowie* (2006) and *Australian Poltergeist* (2014).

LISTEN
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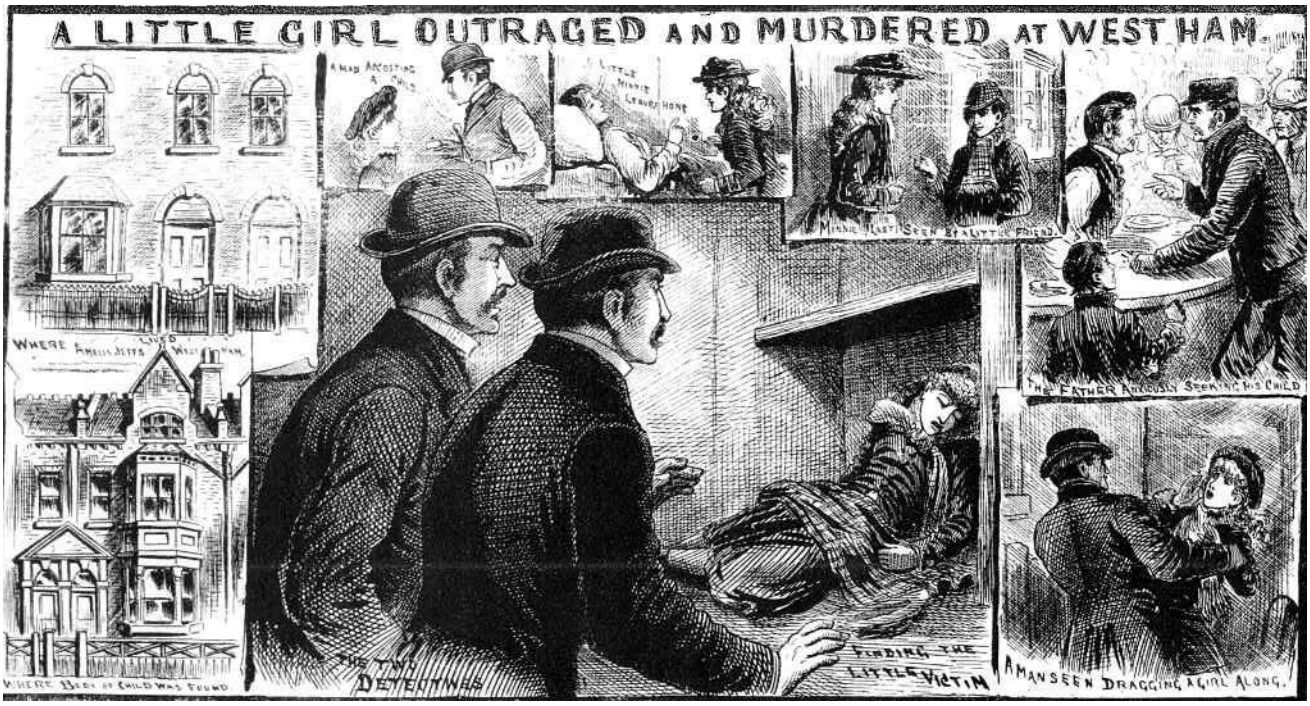
THE WEST HAM DISAPPEARANCES

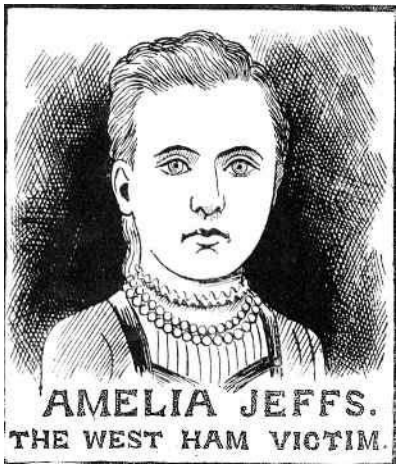
JAN BONDESON tells the story of one of the most shocking crimes of Victorian Britain and shows that the brutal 1890 murder of a young girl in West Ham was in fact the culmination of a string of mysterious unsolved vanishings in the area.


A LITTLE GIRL OUTRAGED AND MURDERED AT WEST HAM.
WHERE BODY OF CHILD WAS FOUND
THE TWO DETECTIVES
FINDING THE LITTLE VICTIM
A MAN SEEN DRAGGING A GIRL ALONG.

Quite possibly the most horrible crime in the late Victorian annals of murder is the 1890 killing of Amelia Jeffs, aged just 15, in the Portway, West Ham. Not only was this a particularly sordid and brutal murder, but it also constituted the culmination of the so-called West Ham Disappearances of the 1880s and 1890s: children and young adults mysteriously disappeared from the peaceful West Ham streets and were never seen again. Estimates of the number of victims have varied from three to a dozen, and more than one author has suggested that supernatural forces were at work.

MILLIE'S LAST ERRAND

Charles Jeffs, a native of Gloucestershire, moved to east London as a young man and became a machinist at the London & Tilbury Railway Works. The 1881 Census has him living at 75 West Road, West Ham, with his wife Mary Annie and his six-year-old daughter Amelia. By 1890, Jeffs had moved down the road to another neat little terraced house at 38 West Road. Amelia, or Millie as she was called, was now 15 years old. Although very pretty, with blue eyes and fair hair, she was a shy, timid girl. She had left school a year earlier, and had two situations as housemaid or nursemaid. She was now staying at home, where she could be depended on to look after her two younger siblings and to perform various household chores. At half past six on the evening of Friday 31 January 1890, Mrs Jeffs sent Millie out to buy threepence-worth of fried fish at a shop in nearby Church Street. The neatly dressed teenage girl took a basket and obediently walked off. When a girl called Elizabeth Harmer saw her in West Street, Millie said that she was going on an errand to buy some fish up by the West Ham Church. A schoolboy saw her going on her way, walking slower than she usually did, and appearing to be rather preoccupied. But



ABOVE: Incidents from the murder of Amelia Jeffs, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 22 Feb 1890.
LEFT: A portrait of Amelia from the same source.

Millie Jeffs never arrived at the fish shop, nor did she return home.

When Millie did not come home, Mr Jeffs went to the fish shop to ask for her, and after learning that she had not arrived there, he went straight to the police station. A description of the missing girl was circulated to all Metropolitan Police stations, and the local West Ham constables made every exertion to find her, but to no avail. Millie's distraught parents also searched for her, and the district was in an uproar. Canon Scott, the influential vicar of West Ham, assured the police that the timid Millie, who had until recently attended the day school he himself supervised, could not have disappeared of her own free will. Foul play must be suspected, and they should make every effort to search all empty houses and other places where a body might be hidden. On 10 February, the popular clergyman made an application to the Stratford Petty Sessions for assistance, by means of publicity, to find Amelia Jeffs. He pointed out that a few years ago, two other girls had disappeared from the neighbourhood of West Road, and there was great fear that Amelia had also been abducted. Amelia Jeffs was four feet six inches (1.4m) tall, with light hair, blue eyes and a fresh complexion. When she left home, she had been wearing a black frock, somewhat ragged, a black and grey ulster, a brown and white straw hat, turned up at the side and trimmed with riband, dark stockings and buttoned boots.

In 1890, West Ham was expanding rapidly, and terraces of houses were being constructed in what had once been rural fields and pastures. One of these building operations had been ongoing in the newly constructed Portway, facing the West Ham Park. A terrace of 10 three-story houses had been constructed about a year earlier, but only one of them had been sold; the others were dirty and unfurnished. On 14 February, when a party of police went to look at the Portway houses as part of the search, they found that some houses had their front doors open, but others were securely locked. Samuel Roberts, an old man who served as caretaker to the builder of the houses, was able to let Sergeant Forth and Constable Cross into most of the houses, but he claimed to have lost the key to No 126. But since the policemen had strict orders from Inspector Thomson to search *all* the houses, they went round to the back and let themselves into through an unlocked window. They detected a noxious smell, and saw that the dust on the floor had been disturbed. Sergeant Forth found a penny, and a small brooch, on the landing, and as he walked upstairs, the smell became stronger and more disagreeable. His olfactory sense led him to a cupboard inside a small front bedroom on the second floor, and in there he found the semi-putrid body of Millie Jeffs.

Police reinforcements, and a competent doctor, were soon on their way to 126 Portway. Poor Amelia had been brutally raped, before being strangled with a scarf. Since her footprints could be seen in the dust on the floor, she had clearly been dragged or cajoled into the house, and murdered there.

ABOVE: Sketches of the locality of the West Ham murder, from the *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 22 Feb 1890.

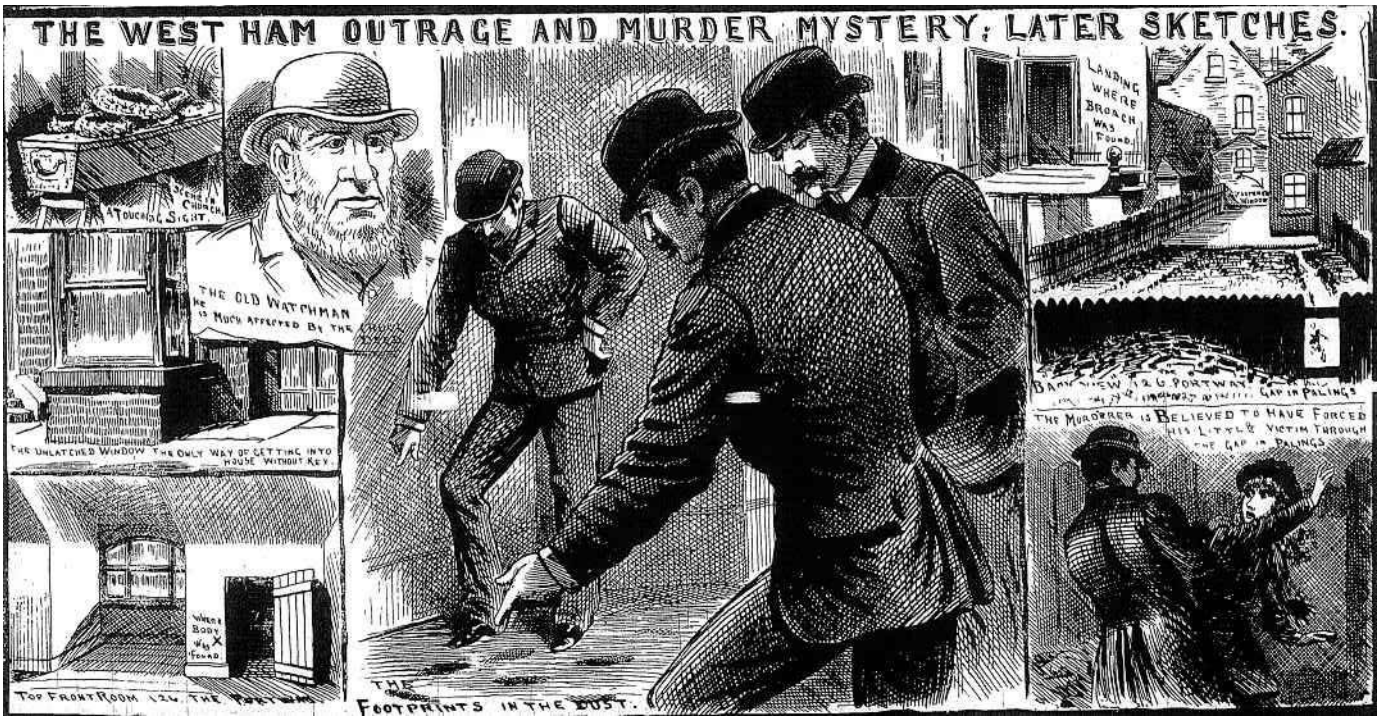
POOR AMELIA HAD BEEN STRANGLED WITH A SCARF

The terrace of houses faced the Portway, but behind them was a field of waste ground awaiting development. Anyone could have negotiated the low fence to the small back garden of No 126 and entered the house through an unsecured ground floor window. After some lead had been stolen from one of the empty houses, old Samuel Roberts had been employed as a watchman to deter thieves and mischievous youngsters out to break windows. Roberts had keys to all the houses except No 126, and he could not explain how he had lost them. After the 'West Ham Atrocity' had been described in the press, two witnesses came forward to the police. One of them had seen a man lead an unwilling girl towards the terrace of empty houses in the Portway, but had not taken any action since he presumed it was a father disciplining his daughter. Another individual had seen a man carry a large bag towards the Portway houses – had it contained the body of Millie Jeffs?

THE INQUEST

On 17 February 1890, Mr CC Lewis, the South Essex coroner, opened the inquest on Amelia Jeffs at the King's Head tavern in West Ham Lane. After the jury had viewed the body and inspected the murder house, Charles Albert Jeffs, the first witness, described how his daughter had disappeared. She had carried a basket, a latchkey, and threepence for the fish. She had often been to this shop in the past, and was always punctual on her errands. Millie had always been a very good girl, and she had never demonstrated any precocious interest in the opposite sex. Mr Jeffs had searched many empty houses while out looking for his missing daughter, and had approached the watchman to get permission to search the terrace in the Portway, but he had only been allowed to search No 122 due to a difficulty in obtaining the keys to the houses.

Mr Joseph Roberts, the builder who had erected the houses in the Portway, and lived just a few doors away, did not deny that Mr Jeffs had approached him about a week earlier, asking permission to search the terrace. Mr Roberts had helped him to have a look around, although there had been difficulties in finding the relevant keys. He could not explain why the key to No 126 was lost, except that his forgetful elderly father Samuel might have left it in another lock by mistake. However, Joseph Roberts felt certain that Millie Jeffs had been abducted and held hostage elsewhere for some days before she was murdered and put in the cupboard at No 126, since his son had made a remarkable discovery the day before the murder. James Roberts, described as an active, bright-looking 14-year-old lad, said that he had made a habit of collecting 'marbles' from empty ginger beer bottles. The carpenters working on the


THE WEST HAM OUTRAGE AND MURDER MYSTERY: LATER SKETCHES.
THE OLD WATCHMAN
LANDING WHERE BROACH WAS FOUND
THE MURDERER IS BELIEVED TO HAVE FORCED HIS LITTLE VICTIM THROUGH THE GAP IN PALINGS
THE FOOTPRINTS IN THE DUST.

ABOVE: Suspects at the coroner's inquest on Amelia Jeffs, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 1 March 1890.

Portway terrace used to leave plenty of bottles behind, so he searched these houses at regular intervals. The day before Millie Jeffs was found at No 126, he had made a thorough search of this house, including the cupboard in the second floor front bedroom. It had been empty.

The police surgeon, Dr Grogono, declared that Millie had been murdered by strangulation. She was likely to have been *virgo intacta* before she was raped. A woollen scarf was tied round her throat, and the deep constriction round her throat contained particles of wool from this scarf. There were considerable signs of putrefaction, and "her appearance was consistent with death having taken place on January 31". Thus the medical evidence spoke in favour of Millie Jeffs being violated and murdered soon after she was abducted, and invalidated Mr Roberts's hypothesis that she had been held captive for a considerable period of time. The police detectives also suspected that the boy James Roberts had been 'telling porkies', since no carpenters had been at work in the terrace of houses for some period of time, and it would hardly have been possible to have searched the houses for bottles on a dark February evening, without striking a match or using a candle.

The London newspapers reported every detail of the murder of Amelia Jeffs, and the outcome of the adjourned inquest. Mr Frederick Smith, the Mayor of West Ham, offered a £100 reward for the apprehension of the murderer, and two other collections were ongoing among the east London burghers. An anonymous well-wisher had paid all costs for an impressive funeral service for Amelia, which was held at West Ham Church on 19 February. Canon Scott expressed grief and shame at the circumstances of the blameless

NEWSPAPERS REPORTED EVERY DETAIL OF THE MURDER

Amelia's untimely and shocking death, and prayed that God would bring the elusive murderer to justice. A large crowd had assembled, many of them carrying wreaths; they accompanied the funeral procession to the East London Cemetery in Plaistow, where a freehold plot had been purchased, to enable a monument to be raised. It is sad but true, however, that no gravestone or monument marks the place of the grave of the murdered girl today.

Both Mr Lewis the coroner and Mr Foden the foreman of the jury fully shared the police suspicions against the Roberts family, and they faced a further hostile reception when the inquest was resumed on 3 March. First, Mr Jeffs was asked whether Amelia had known any person connected with the row of houses in the Portway; he said that she had more than once spoken of 'Daddy Watchman', as the other children called Samuel Roberts. This individual was himself the next witness. He said that he lodged with his son James at 78 Evesham Road, and worked as caretaker and odd jobs man for his other son Joseph. He denied ever having met Amelia Jeffs, and she had never called him 'Daddy Watchman', as the other children were in the habit of doing. He made a number of confused statements about the missing set of keys to No 126, being pressed quite hard by the coroner and jurors, who clearly suspected that he had something to hide.

Joseph Roberts testified that although all the Portway houses had been completed, they still needed some attention from the plumber and painter to be fully habitable. There had once been two sets of keys for each house, kept in a small cupboard, but one of the sets for No 126 had been missing for five or six months. The day Amelia Jeffs had disappeared, Joseph Roberts had come home from work at a quarter to six, and not gone out again, he said. The builder then faced a barrage of hostile questions from the jurors, many of which he parried using his father's indifferent powers of memory as an excuse. Mr Lewis said that since Amelia's boots had not been dirty, she could hardly have walked through the mud in the rear garden; had the murderer let her into the house through the front door, using the missing keys to open it?

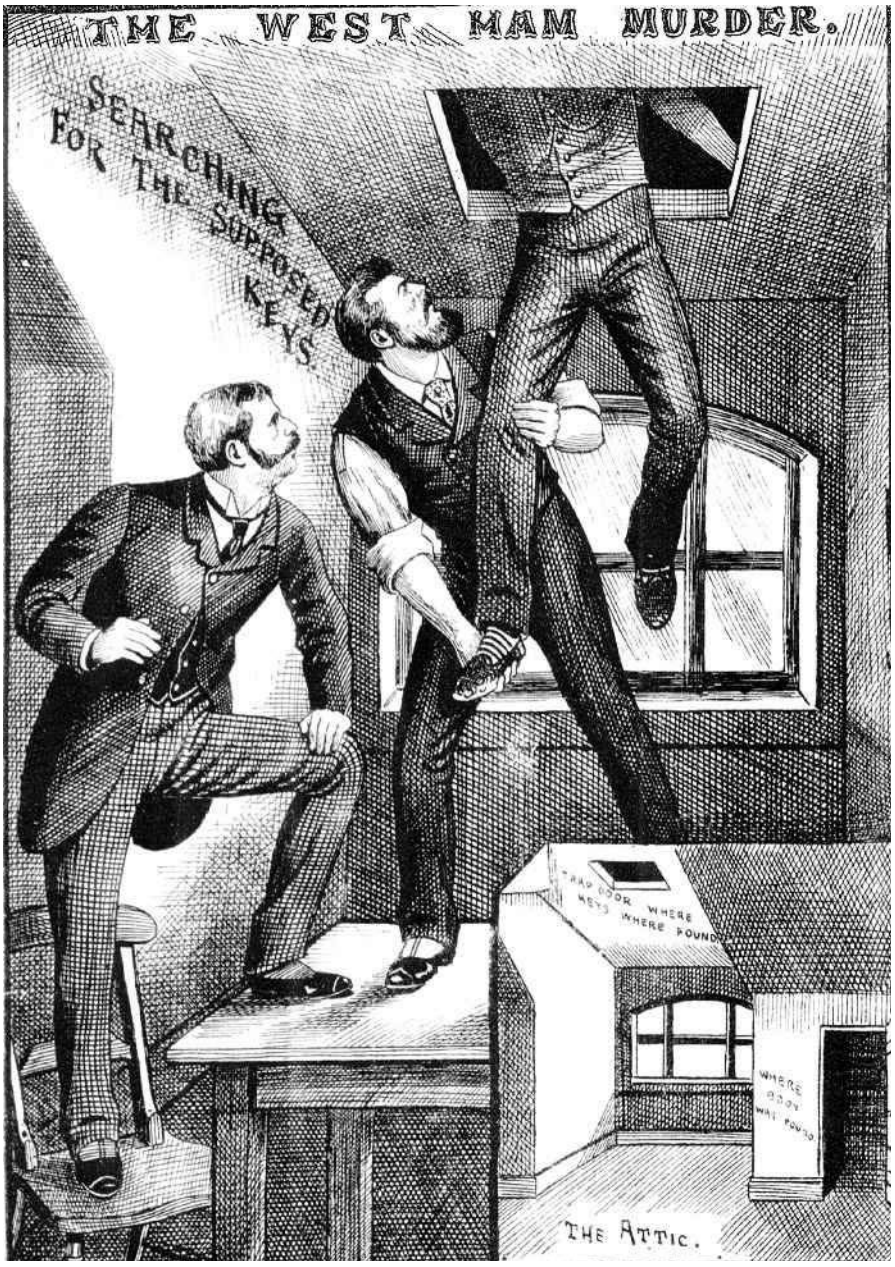
When the adjourned inquest was resumed a week later, Joseph Roberts was reminded that back in November 1889 he had called the police after some lead and piping had been stolen from No 120 Portway. He had been overheard saying that "they" had got in through a rear window and opened the front door, probably alluding to the thieves. There was sensation in court when Police Inspector James Harvey testified that, along with Joseph Roberts, he had inspected all the houses in the terrace except for No 134; he was certain that Roberts had opened all the other front doors for him with his bunch of keys. He could distinctly remember entering the future murder house, No 126. Joseph Roberts objected that he had only let the inspector into five of the houses, but when the policeman's note-book was examined, it turned out that he was telling the truth.

Young James Roberts was the next witness; he repeated his story of entering the murder house the day before Amelia was found and searching every room, including the upstairs bedroom, where the cupboard had been empty. The jurors were wholly incredulous, as was the coroner. In his summing-up, Mr Lewis said that although young James Roberts's story must be false, he believed that this was due to the lad mistaking the days, rather than lying. There was no further evidence to be added, and the jury returned a verdict of murder against some person or persons unknown.

THE HOUSE WITH THE SINISTER CUPBOARD

In early May 1890, the murder house at 126 Portway was taken for three years by Mr Bitten and Mr Hewitt, two officers of the Essex County Council, although their wives and servants were reluctant to move into this house of horrors. And sure enough, one of the domestics was terrified when she heard ghostly footsteps in the landing just a few days later. Mr Bitten and Mr Hewitt, who did not believe in ghosts, decided to search the house. When they opened a trapdoor leading to the attic, and entered the roof void where the cistern was kept, they saw that some bricks had been disturbed in the dividing wall to No 125, leaving a small aperture. Here, the two men found two keys with a cardboard label saying '126'! Had the 'ghostly footsteps' been those of the murderer, or an accomplice, entering the house to replace the missing keys? When interviewed by a journalist, Joseph Roberts pooh-poohed these concerns: it must have been the house painter Mr Warren who had left them up there. Nor did the police show any particular interest in this singular discovery, not understanding why the murderer would want to enter a fully inhabited house at night, to put some keys in the attic.

The police file on the Amelia Jeffs case should have been at the National Archives, but I find nothing to suggest that it has ever been there. It might have been lost or mislaid, or stolen by some detective who wanted to keep studying this mysterious murder. In his memoirs, Sir Melville Macnaghten briefly discussed the Jeffs case, with the same obtuseness and carelessness evident in his Memorandum on Jack the Ripper. None of the houses in the Portway terrace was fit for habitation, he pontificated (one was inhabited, and the others ready to be sold), and it was a workman who had found the body, completely by chance (it was the police, as the result of a search). Macnaghten claims to have been at the scene himself to see the murdered girl: "The body looked as if it had been 'laid out' by loving hands, as for decent burial, the little hands were crossed on the bosom, the frock carefully pulled down, and the hat, which must have fallen off in the house, placed *by*, but not *on*, the head." This is a decidedly strange description of the semi-putrid remains of a raped and murdered girl. Macnaghten had also seen the marks of Amelia's heels in the dust on the floor, and he presumed that the murderer had lured her



TOP: The entrance to West Ham Park from the Portway, from an old postcard. **ABOVE:** Did the Portway killer return to replace the keys? From the *Illustrated Police News*, 24 May 1890.

ABOVE LEFT: The murder house at 126 Portway as it looks today. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A portrait of Eliza Carter, who also disappeared from the West Ham area, from the *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 18 Feb 1882.

into the house, the door of which had been left open by accident. He concludes by claiming that there had been "very grave suspicions attached to a certain individual. Legal proofs were wanting, and, there being no sufficient evidence to justify an arrest, it must be classified as an 'undiscovered' crime." The Report of the Commission of Metropolitan Police for 1890 states that the only capital crime left unaccounted for in 1890 was the murder of Amelia Jeffs, since "the evidence against the author of the crime was deemed insufficient to justify his arrest. In respect to this case it is only right to add popular suspicion did grave injustice to an innocent person."

As for the murder house, the ghost-hunter Elliott O'Donnell wrote that Portway's 'House with the Sinister Cupboard' had not only witnessed one of the grimmest and most mysterious murders upon record but was also haunted by all kinds of super-physical horrors. To disguise its identity, the Portway houses were renumbered, O'Donnell claimed. But there is no contemporary account of 126 Portway being haunted, after the episode of the rediscovered keys in May 1890, nor is there any reason to believe that the houses were ever renumbered. The terrace of 10 three-story houses is still there today, between Caistor Park Road and Geere Road, and No 126 looks virtually unchanged since the time of the murder back in 1890.

THE VANISHINGS

And here the matter might well have ended, with regard to the mysterious unsolved murder of Amelia Jeffs, but several commentators have pointed out that in the 1880s, there had been a series of other mysterious crimes, many of them against young girls, in the West Ham area. In April 1881, 14-year-old Mary Seward left her family home at 98 West Road, to go round the neighbourhood and look for her little nephew. Mary went out at six in the evening, and several neighbours could remember the neatly dressed teenage girl knocking at their doors to ask if they had seen the boy. Later in the evening, the nephew was brought home by some other children, but Mary herself was nowhere to be found, nor did she come home the following day. Since she was described as being very happy at home and at school, and fond of her parents, foul play was immediately suspected. In spite of a newspaper scare that poor Mary had been kidnapped by white slavers and taken abroad, and another that she was held as a slave-girl by a gang of Italian crooks at Saffron Hill, nothing more was heard of her.

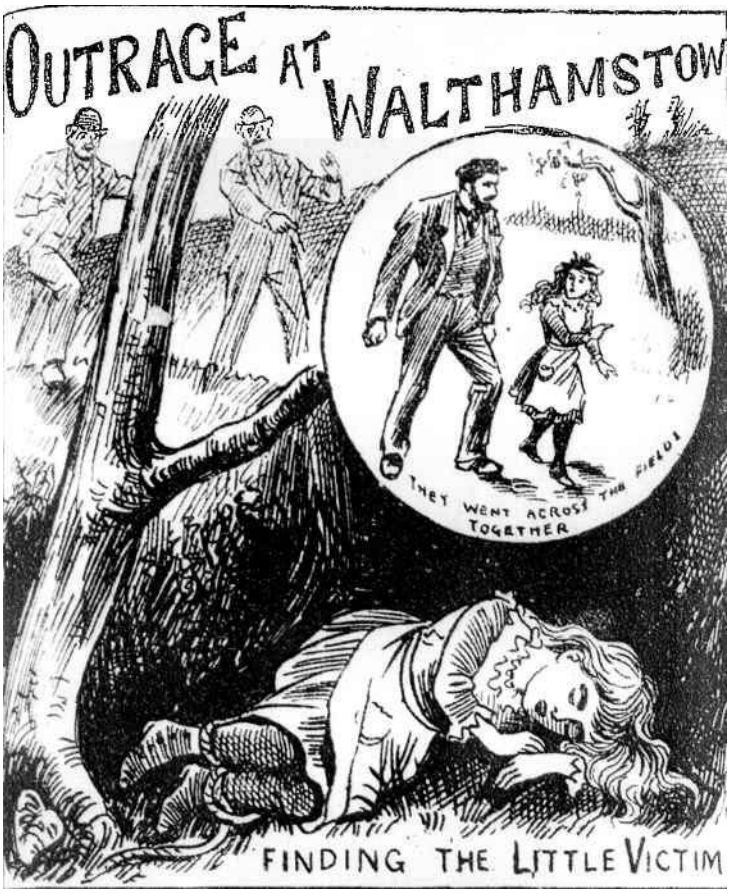
In January 1882, 12-year-old Eliza Carter disappeared from her married sister's house at 70 West Road. Her dress was found in West Ham Park, with all the buttons torn off, and there was suspicion she had been raped and murdered. A portrait of Eliza shows her as a far from attractive girl, very thin and pale, with a pinched expression and brown plaited hair. When she had disappeared, she had been wearing a blue kilted dress, a white straw hat, and high laced boots. There was again much uproar in West Ham, and people recalled the case of Mary Seward, and also an incident when a young girl had been assaulted and raped in West Ham Park nearby. In January 1883, there was newspaper speculation that the decomposed body of a girl found in the St Luke's slums was either Mary Seward or Eliza Carter, but when the sets of parents had seen the remains, they both failed to claim them as those of their daughter.

There were many other alleged disappearances of girls, boys and adults, and the legend of the West Ham Vanishings, sometimes stated to involve 10 or more people, and to have involved supernatural forces, had begun. Charles Wagner, the son of a well-to-do pork butcher carrying on business at 104 Victoria Dock Road, Canning Town, disappeared in April 1882 after being sent to the bank to deposit £150 of his father's money. It turned out that young Wagner had been lured away to Ramsgate by the journeyman butcher James Walter. After Charles Wagner's dead body had been found underneath East Cliff, Walter stood trial for murdering him and

ABOVE: The body of Bertha Russ is found, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 11 Mar 1899.

stealing the money, but he was found guilty only of the theft, and was sentenced to seven years in prison. It is notable that although many alleged East London disappearances were reported from 1882 until 1884, there were none in the six following years, until Amelia Jeffs was abducted in January 1890. It is also notable that at this time, Mary Seward and Eliza Carter were the only 'official' missing girls; the other alleged 'vanishings' would appear to have been either spurious or eventually resolved.

According to Elliott O'Donnell and other early chroniclers of the West Ham Vanishings, these mysterious disappearances ended with Amelia's murder in 1890. It is not generally known that the eastern and northeastern suburbs of London were the site of a number of unsolved crimes during the 1890s, all of them with young girls as the victims. In August 1892, the 23-year-old Walthamstow labourer George Herbert Bush confessed that he had murdered Amelia Jeffs, by chloroforming her. He was a known petty criminal, who had also spent lengthy periods in various asylums. Since there was nothing to suggest that chloroform had been administered to Amelia Jeffs, and since the police believed that Bush had been in prison at the time of the murder, he was not taken seriously. In December 1892, 10-year-old Annie West was found dead in a ditch in Walthamstow. The same evening, George Herbert Bush had returned to his lodgings in a soaking wet condition, allegedly from falling into a ditch. He had been discharged from Brentwood Lunatic Asylum just a few days earlier. Bush admitted murdering Annie West, and he was taken into police custody once more. The autopsy showed no signs of rape or violence, and Annie West had not drowned in the ditch, since her lungs contained no water. Bush's confession was not believed, and he was once more set at large. In July 1893, 11-year-old Eliza Skinner was assaulted and raped in Walthamstow. In December 1898, five-year-old Mary Jane Voller was found murdered in a ditch in Barking, and just a few months later, five-year-old Bertha Russ was found murdered inside a cupboard in an empty house in Lawrence Avenue, Little Ilford; neither of these two murders was ever solved.



LEFT: The Eliza Skinner case, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 8 July 1893.

SUSPECTS AND SOLUTIONS

The murder of Amelia Jeffs is very likely to have been committed by a pervert with a liking for young girls. He showed impressive coolness and cunning, and was probably living in the neighbourhood of the Portway and West Road, since he had good local knowledge. There is nothing to suggest that the killer held a grudge against the Jeffs family, and the choice of victim would appear to have been made at random: in the empty West Ham lanes, the predator chanced to meet his prey that dark January evening, to lethal effect. It is not known whether rape or murder was foremost in the mind of the attacker when he grabbed the girl; nor is it known how he was able to subdue her and stop her from crying out. He might have stunned her with a blow and put her in a large bag or sack; another alternative is that he managed to cajole her into accompanying him to the empty house, but would the shy Millie Jeffs really go along with a sinister stranger to such a spooky and solitary house? Still, the absence of mud from Amelia's boots, and the queer business concerning the missing keys to No 126 Portway, would suggest that she went with her attacker, and that she was let in through the front door. When reading about the abduction, rape and murder of blameless young Amelia Jeffs, an immediate reflection is that this was unlikely to have been the first time the perpetrator had abducted and violated a young girl. The crime was committed in a very smooth and accomplished manner, with little risk for the culprit to be caught in the act.

There has been much speculation about the West Ham Disappearances, much of it idle nonsense from imaginative students of the occult, who have tried various schemes to bolster the number of victims from 1881 until 1890, and to make it appear as if supernatural forces were involved. But in real life, we have seven verified 'disappearances' of young girls, from 1881 until 1899. The two earliest victims, Mary Seward and Eliza Carter, were never found; the bodies of Amelia Jeffs and Bertha Russ were both found inside cupboards in empty houses; Annie West, Eliza Skinner and Mary Jane Voller were all found drowned or near-drowned after being submerged in ponds or ditches. Is it not peculiar that three adolescent girls disappeared from the very same street, West Road, in 1881, 1882 and 1890? And then we have a report of two not dissimilar crimes in Walthamstow in 1892 and 1893; is it just a coincidence that the man confessing to one of them had previously given himself up for murdering Amelia Jeffs? And finally, we have the matter of two more unsolved murders of young girls, in 1898 and 1899; is it not rather odd that one of them was also found inside an upstairs cupboard in an empty, recently constructed house? To be sure, it would have been interesting to know the name of the builder of the Lawrence Avenue murder house, which was still unnumbered at the time of the murder.

As for suspects, one of them is James Walters, who was lucky to get off the charge of murdering Charles Wagner in 1882; after spending seven years in prison, he would have emerged from his cell in 1889. This would explain the hiatus between the two abductions in 1881 and 1882, and the murder of Amelia Jeffs in 1890. But Walters does not appear to have been a pervert, rather a mercenary robber who took advantage of his young victim's trust. Then we have the weirdo George Herbert Bush, who actually admitted murdering Amelia Jeffs, but he seems to have been just plain crazy, whereas the true murderer was a cool, calculating man. At the coroner's inquest, Joseph Roberts emerged as the leading suspect, perhaps along with his father Samuel, whose memory failure seemed to happen only at convenient times. In particular, the false testimony provided by the lad James provides food for thought: had his father told him to lie, in order to confound the police and coroner? And might the length of the series of crimes perhaps be explained by the existence of two perverted serial killers of young girls, from the same family? FT

This is an edited excerpt from *Rivals of the Ripper* by Jan Bondeson (History Press 2016).

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

JAN BONDESON is a senior lecturer at Cardiff University, a regular contributor to FT and the author of numerous books, including *Queen Victoria's Stalker* (2010), and *Murder Houses of London* (2014).

THE HOUSE OF ETERNAL RETURN

PAUL ROSS visits Santa Fe's latest arts attraction, a surreal funhouse that fuses art and technology to create a multi-dimensional interactive narrative of high strangeness... and all in an abandoned bowling alley owned by George RR Martin. Photos by the author.

"Something's happening here.
What it is ain't exactly clear"
- Buffalo Springfield

Yes, something did happen. In an isolated section of a small northern California town, an entire family disappeared – suddenly and without leaving their home. There are no signs of violence. No blood. But there are plenty of clues. Weird ones. And you are invited into the house to wander freely around the eerie environments, snoop through the evidence, and come to your own conclusion – if you can.

This is the immersive milieu of art collective Meow Wolf's "House of Eternal Return" which, in only three months, has drawn an unprecedented 130,000 visitors to Santa Fe, New Mexico (a small city, disproportionately renowned for art) and blurred the lines between entertainment, interactive and immersive storytelling, science fiction, engineering, art installation and 21st century fun house.

Situated in a 33,000ft^2 (3,066m^2) former bowling facility whose pin-shaped, neon lit signage has been repurposed but not replaced, the experience begins before you get out of your car. The parking lot is surrounded by massive sculptures: a house-sized dog, a daisy-clutching robot and a giant, articulated spider. The playful art space theme carries on through the foyer and ticketing area. But the mood changes upon entering the main exhibit. The House of Eternal Return is indeed a house: a two-story Victorian mansion located not in Santa Fe but Mendocino on California's North Coast. "Every house you walk through has a story," teases one of the collective's artists Emily Markweise. And, in the House of Eternal Return, the story starts when you cross the threshold at perennial dusk into a quaint, upper-middle class home. But wait

ABOVE: Construction work on the house exterior.
LEFT: A poster hints at the weirdness within.

– something isn't quite right. A fireplace seems to be a portal that leads... somewhere. The dining room ceiling is crumpled into a frozen puddle of concentric circles, and you feel a dark vibe – literally – as the furniture rattles periodically from subsonic waves.

This is where you begin your investigations into a branching mystery. Your choice of paths winds through to various sections of the house: a study (insider's tip: look at the journal and log onto the computer for hints of supernatural elements at work); a child's bedroom (which is bizarrely echoed visually elsewhere in the house); a teen girl's room, where fandom is phantom; a classic tiled bathroom which is physically distorted and clue-laden; even the kitchen holds a portal to another dimension.

The sensorially overwhelming project's humble beginnings were at a teen centre,

ABOVE: There's a 1950s B-movie vibe in the parking lot, where you're met by a giant robot and a massive metal spider. **BELOW:** George RR Martin on opening night.

where a small group of frustrated artists, tired of establishment restrictions and gallery limitations, formed a creative collective intended to fly in the face of convention. The group grew in size and ambition, as did the space they shared, and began fashioning ambitious installations that transcended the traditional boundaries of art, performance, and gallery. The group's quirky name came from words randomly drawn from a hat.

Five years ago, Meow Wolf made "The Due Return," an interactive 70ft (21m) long wooden-hulled spaceship, which, as the legend they also created has it, carried pilgrims on a cosmic voyage of discovery. Only the contents of the vessel provided data about the absent passengers and crew. Twenty-five thousand attendees saw that show. Because of the sheer numbers and enthusiasm of visitors, the group began to realise that they were onto something – something quite special and potentially groundbreaking. When they formed Chimera, an arts education programme, in 2011, and nearly 1,000 students signed up to help create the synthetic, and highly-satirical, big box "Omega Mart", Meow Wolf were sure of their concept and methodology: create environments that combine the work of different artists.

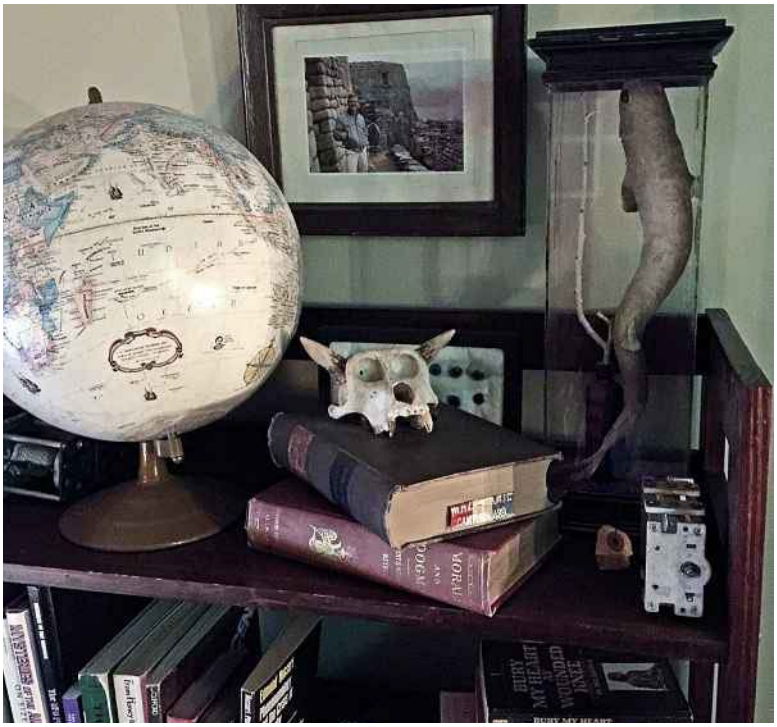
Since Meow Wolf was already beating the odds in the art world, CEO/Co-Founder Vince Kadlubek took the chance of approaching Santa Fe resident celebrity, and *Game of Thrones* author, George RR Martin for support. Martin jumped enthusiastically on board, becoming both a sponsor and the company's landlord when he purchased the derelict bowling lanes.

"I loved the whole idea," said Martin, a self-identified "science fiction and fantasy guy," describing the project as "right up my alley." (No bowling pun intended?) Shortly afterwards, private investment in the putative arts complex surpassed the million dollar mark and a dream was realised.

The idea of randomness was built into the House of Eternal Return from the beginning. The initial envisioning/writing team was encouraged to work from a vague, generalised premise and to develop story arcs for their individualised characters, the Seligs, a fictitious family who occupied the house. Then a second writing team was brought in to "beat out the details," explains Carolyn Miller, a creative storyteller who specialises in non-linear entertainment for new media and has heavy Hollywood credits. "The ultimate goal was to screenwrite narrative-element videos embedded around the house." The result is hundreds of hours of multi-media content.

Turning the diverse story and character elements into a phsyical reality is difficult enough without attempting to meld

THE IDEA OF RANDOMNESS WAS BUILT INTO THE HOUSE



ABOVE: Two of the house's many rooms: dimensional slippage in the dining room, and the study, full of clues that something strange was going to overtake the Selig family.
ABOVE: Custom-moulded railings being installed in the Peter Pan-like tree house found deep in the Meow Wolf warren.

independent artists together to do it. "We had no map going into the project for how to introduce a story into our kind of 3-D environment. The closest things were video games like Myst," says Christopher J Johnson, one of the House's core creators. "It was a matter of reverse engineering. We defined the artists' spaces and figured out how they might be worked into our narrative." The construction "was very much like a film project," explains lead House designer and experienced motion picture set designer/builder Chadney Everett, who adds that the differences were the ability to "change one's mind in mid-stream" and that rather than assigned and pre-defined jobs, supervision emerged through "hierarchies of information".

As the project neared completion, says Tara Carstensen, another Meow Wolf artist, "there were over 200 people who contributed to the House." Eventually, that number would escalate to an estimated 500. Co-founder Corvas Brinkerhoff has oxymoronically defined Meow Wolf as "an anarchist collective that's super organised." You might say that the group's collaborative structure is somewhat similar to the way Christopher J Johnson describes the underlying and intertwining themes threading through all the stories presented in the house: "It's order versus chaos."

Which brings us back to our story about what happened in the House. And don't worry, I promise not to reveal any 'spoilers'.

By now, you may have guessed that, with all the strange phenomena swirling around them, the Seligs are not the average family they first appeared to be. Their mystical heritage is deep and long, and science *and* magic are manifest in two family members.

THE COMPLEX HAS BECOME A LOCUS OF SOCIAL ACTIVITY

They also have powerful enemies. Evil is necessary for a good story, and it's here in the House. As are wonder, delight, challenge, adventure and surprise. No matter which portal you enter, or which path you take, you will find multi-dimensional realms and be delivered to glowing caves, fairy-lit tree houses, a harbourside ghost town, and a vertically oriented (VR drivable) bus; locales that are also projections of the dreams, aspirations and fears of the Selig family.

In his House-related TED-X talk, Kadlubek stated: "Time and space have been compromised by wormholes [which] act as secret passageways to an entire multiverse of imaginative spaces". It's a definition that, like the House experience itself, can obfuscate as much as it enlightens.

Most visitors wander around, consumed with (and often overwhelmed by) the creative design, bizarre and playful environments, and quirky, colourful, vibrant art that covers every inch of the installation. Some House guests are attracted and drawn into the fortean story of paranormal dimensions, finding and following clues and unravelling the mystery of the missing family. "There's too much," one father exclaimed to his son. "We'll have to come back to try to figure it out." The boy, who was tapping fluorescent, sculpted mushrooms to trigger light and sound displays, didn't object.

In spite of its strangeness, or maybe partially because of it, the Meow Wolf arts complex has become a locus of social activity for a young demographic whose interactions more customarily take place as Facebook exchanges rather than as real-

time, face-to-face conversations. There's a performance venue, arts classes for all ages, and makers' space open to the entire community, as well as a local microbrew taproom and gift shop. Here you can buy affordable art creations, T-shirts, and CDs of the House music score and sound environments. There's even an Art-O-Mat, reborn from what was previously a cigarette vending machine, for *really* affordable collectibles.

The reach extends far beyond the doors: the parking lot is now a haven for an enticing variety of food trucks, and local businesses of all sorts are enjoying an uptick in revenue.

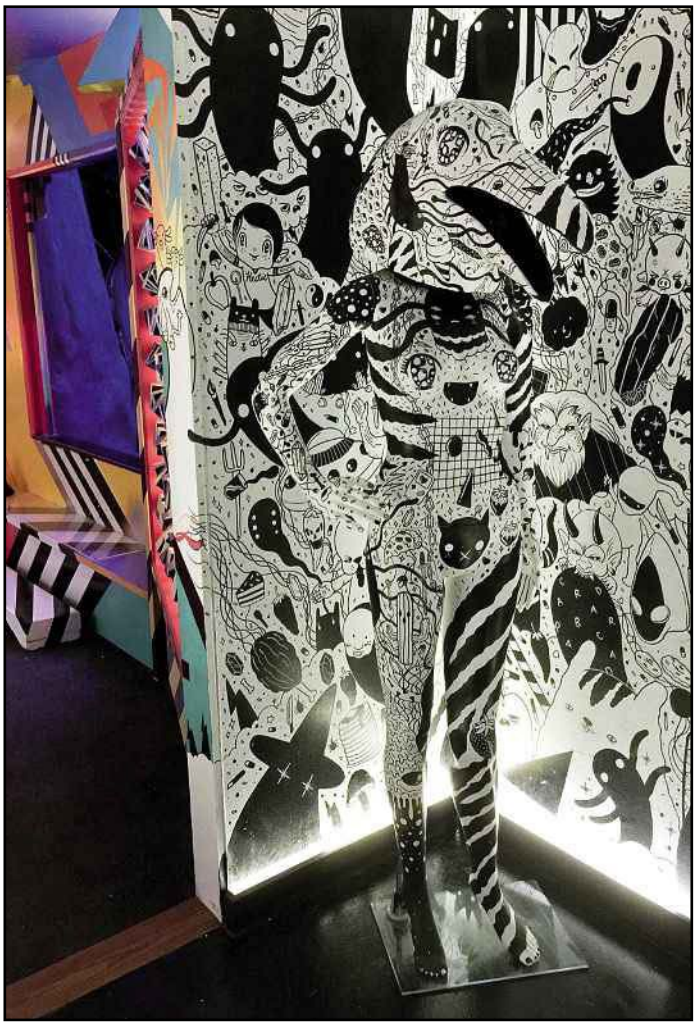
The Meow Wolfers (an arbitrary term as, true to their free-form spirit, they don't have a collectively-identifying moniker) are also creating artworks in other locations and other cities. Many of the artists are also inventors, and are now selling some of the technologies they created during the fabrication of the House of Eternal Return. The House is made of various materials that bridge the worlds of high-tech industry and art, such as heat-mouldable thermoplastics, rapid air-drying sculpture media, much medium-density fibreboard and, mostly, imagination. When you see a four-meter-tall bunny with glowing eyes glaring at you out of a darkened corner, you don't stop to think about how it was created or what it's made of – you just marvel and/or shudder; and moving from an incandescent cave system to a one-dimensional black-and-white room straight out of a 1930s cartoon elicits a frisson of glee that delights the kid in all of us. Actual children (who are seemingly born pre-wired for technology) comprehend the presentations fastest, being self-programmed for game role-playing and interactive storytelling.

Music director and sound engineer Ben Wright confesses that he "loves shifting perspectives though time and multi-dimensions". In one space, sculptor/inventor Mat Cimmins fashioned what looks like a bioluminescent fossilised mastodon with Flintstone-sque xylophonic ribs. And, in another corner of a tiny universe, Cole Bee Wilson crafted a sit down and play-it-yourself electronically bowed piano backed by a dark blue field of 1,700,000 hand pin-pricked "stars."

For enthusiasts of science fiction or forteana, the House is a three-dimensional experience where touching, feeling, and exploring the environment are all encouraged. There are none of the restrictions that are part of most museum experiences. So, it's not only little kids that get to have a hands-on, tactile experience, but "big kids" too.

The House is engineered for it. From the beginning, founding members of the Meow Wolf collective experienced "Aha! moments," says Emily Montoya, a graphic artist who was on the initial narrative team and has since grown, evolved and mutated along with the project into a three-dimensional tech developer. "Seeing what other artists were doing opened my eyes." Her principal contribution is a *Total Recall-*

TOP LEFT: The 'art-o-mat'. **TOP RIGHT:** A child's nightmare lurks in the shadows. **ABOVE:** Meow Wolf collective always recycles, as this sign – adapted from the site's previous life as a bowling alley – demonstrates.



ABOVE LEFT: Visitors can stroll through a pet goldfish's view of the world. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A strange crow woman in one of the 70 rooms of the House. **BELOW:** The seemingly normal turning distinctly strange is a theme that runs through much of the House of Eternal Return; the strange warping afflicting the toilet is just one example.

meets-*Westworld* (minus the lethal glitches) creation called "Portals Bermuda." It's a kind of an astral travel agency where fanciful branching stories enable tourists' visits to their multi-dimensional choice of realms, places and times on worlds both distant and familiar.

Montoya adds: "It presents a chance to step out of the everyday and examine your life" in such colourful locales as a Carboniferous-period swampland and St Malibados, "the best beach resort in the galaxy". But one has to hurry, because it's all disappearing fast. According to the backstory narrative, the rift in the spacetime continuum is closing, and no one knows what may cease to exist next (in spite of the weekly "closed for maintenance"signs that signal cleaning and repairs every Tuesday). And this is just *one* of 70 actualised rooms in this warren of intersecting vortices and non-linear storytelling, this modern-day cabinet of curiosities that has been called variously "Part haunted house and part jungle gym" (*LA Times*), "An amusement park for people who want a weirder Disneyland" (*Ars Technica* magazine), and "Pee-Wee's Playhouse on steroids" (*National Public Radio*).

Beyond all the maintenance, tweaking and upgrading of the central and permanent

House exhibit, including subtle adjustments to the story and its presentation, the Meow Wolf collective is already hard at work on a number of other projects which include: a full wall mural at a nearby shopping centre; sales of some of the art tech they've developed, from intricate computer control systems to audio and video servo-motors and unique apps for Arduino and Raspberry Pi devices; presenting rotating art exhibits and multi-media performances; hosting a unique community-oriented maker space and the creative educational Chimera organisation; showcasing work by the myriad (who knows how many now?) contributing artists; participating for a second time in the cutting-edge Life Is Beautiful Festival in Las Vegas (www.lifeisbeautiful.com); and what Meow Wolfer Caity Kennedy describes hopefully as "the next big thing" – an even more involved and even larger permanent art installation in another city.

Oh, and there's one last hint about the House of Eternal Return that I can't help but tease you with. Before leaving the upstairs bathroom, be sure to look down inside the toilet bowl. It's a portal... and a scary prospect. FT

Further information: www.meowwolf.com

Meow Wolf Arts Complex and House of Eternal Return exhibit space, 1352 Rufina Circle, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Open Wednesday to Monday 10am-8pm, Late on Friday & Saturday (especially for performances).

Ticket prices: Adults $18, Children (12 and under) $10, Seniors $16.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

PAUL ROSS travels the world documenting the historic, unusual and just plain weird in words and images. He's based in Santa Fe, surrounded by the ghosts of the old West, and can be found online at www.globaladventure.us

DISCOVER

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GOVERNMENT LEEKS

SD TUCKER mines the politics of Wales, finding that both democratic druids and socialist shamans have long been assured of a warm welcome in the valleys.

MAERS / FOX PHOTOS / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: The Gorsedd of the Bards hold a Proclamation ceremony at Duffryn Woods, 1940.

Holidays in Wales are not always the happy events that TV Tourist Board adverts would have us believe. WY Evans-Wentz, for example, who visited the principality during the early 1900s as part of his famous survey of the fairy-faith of Celtic lands, was disappointed to find it afforded leaner folkloric pickings than the other locations on his itinerary. Wales, said Evans-Wentz, conquered by England in 1282, deracinated and forced to join the modern industrial world by its distant Westminster rulers, "does not now exhibit in a vigorous or flourishing state those Celtic influences which, when they were active, did so much to create the precious Romances of Arthur and his Brotherhood". There was still hope for the poor coal-miners of Cymru, however, he said, for "the strong hold which the druidic *Eisteddfod*... continues to have upon the Welsh people, in spite of their [modern] commercialism, is... a sign that their hearts remain uncorrupted, that when the more favourable hour strikes they will sweep aside the deadening influences which now hold them in spiritual bondage, and become, as they were in the past, true children of Arthur."[1]

MEMBERS OF THE SACRED ORDER INCLUDE GARETH EDWARDS AND BRYN TERFEL

Unless Evans-Wentz actually meant Arthur Scargill, however, he was wrong. Rather than neo-Arthurian movements of cultural regeneration, the only mass political faction most people would associate with Wales today is that of the Labour movement – until recently the Party could put a red rosette on a sheep and have it elected in some places. Throughout the 1960s and '70s, though, small seeds of change began to sprout. Whereas once teachers had rapped the knuckles of boys caught speaking Welsh in class with a ruler, a new pride in the threatened native language took root, with the 1967 Welsh Language Act affording the tongue equal status in law and government.[2] It seemed as if Wales was at last on the march... and then, in 1979, came a referendum upon whether or not the principality should get its own devolved National Assembly. The final result was an embarrassingly definitive 'Yes' 20.3%, 'No' 79.7%. Far from an unstoppable tide, the 'resurgent' forces of Welsh nationalism were really just a minority interest after all.[3]

RED MEN DON'T VOTE PLAID

Nonetheless, this was the period when Plaid Cymru, the patriotic 'Party of Wales', which today commands respectable levels of support, began to have its first small taste of electoral success. In 1966, Plaid gained

their first-ever Westminster MP, with Party leader Gwynfor Evans successfully contesting that year's Carmarthen by-election. A fan of mediæval Welsh poetry, Evans's main political goal was to gain official recognition for his native tongue – an aim in which, as we have seen, he succeeded. So committed was Evans to this cause that in 1980 he even threatened to go on hunger strike unless Mrs Thatcher did an uncharacteristic u-turn and agreed not to renege on her manifesto promise to fund the new Welsh-language TV station S4C. Was *Pobol y Cwm* really worth the potential sacrifice? [4]

The Lady may have been for turning on this particular occasion, but it took rather longer for Plaid to turn around the initial public perceptions of them and their members. Founded, significantly enough, after a meeting of various then-prominent Welsh nationalists at an *Eisteddfod* in 1925, it was really just a pressure group rather than a proper political party in its early days, lobbying for greater recognition of traditional Welsh culture and language. According to the early Plaid luminary Saunders Lewis, in such a deracinated land as Wales, "the only proof that the Welsh nation exists is that there are some who act *as if it did* exist." The trouble was, to the average uninformed observer, especially in England, the notion many of these early Welsh nationalists had of 'acting like a Welshman' looked uncannily like dressing up as Getafix and engaging in sinister pagan festivals disguised as harmless 'poetry readings' once a year. Particularly telling was a term coined by English officials to describe the supposedly treacherous pacifist-type beliefs of some Plaid members and their fellow-travellers (like the conscientious objector Gwynfor Evans) during the years of WWII – namely, 'Bards Under the Bed'. [5]

A crude slur, maybe, but it cannot be denied that some Plaid members down the years have indeed been officially made Druids and Bards at an *Eisteddfod*. But what, precisely, does this mean? A good way to examine the issue is by recalling the furore which surrounded the then-Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams being made a Druid at 2002's *Eisteddfod* in Pembrokeshire. Noticing that the ceremony involved the blasting of trumpets and the unsheathing of a ritual sword, some hysterical evangelical types accused Welshman Williams of engaging in unholy rituals. One Elfyn Llwyd, however, then a Plaid MP and a Druid himself, explained that the ceremony was "clearly" not pagan, being instead "rather a quaint induction... for assisting the development of Welsh language and culture" which was "in a way akin to a Welsh honours system". Just as prominent Brits knighted with a sword by HM the Queen are rarely required to mount a horse and slay dragons, so very few Welsh Druids are asked to sacrifice babies to Baal. Indeed,

ABOVE: Iolo Morganwg, political radical, founder of the Gorsedd and inventor of Welsh traditions.

current members of the Sacred Order include not Merlin and Mordred, but the rather more prosaic names of rugby player Gareth Edwards and opera singer Bryn Terfel. The fact that a number of Plaid members have also been Druids thus means only that they have been honoured for services to their country – as, indeed, have people with other political allegiances. Rowan Williams himself chose the Druid-name 'ap Aneuri', for example, after his hero Aneurin Bevan, the Labour MP who fathered the NHS, and another anointed Druid is none other than Ron Davies, Labour's Welsh Secretary under Tony Blair. Whilst Mr Davies (or 'Ron o Vachen' in Druid-speak) is an acknowledged nature-mystic who famously enjoyed taking nocturnal rambles across Clapham Common and through woodlands in search of badgers, dull quotes such as "Devolution is a process and not an event" are about as near as you could ever get to hear him uttering a magic spell. [6]

Gradually Plaid began to address other issues, though, picking up the votes of Welsh Greens and CND members throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the reaction of the more established parties to their rise being one of contempt. According to Tory leader Ted Heath, Plaid politicos were nothing more than a bunch of no-goodnik hippies offering "flower-politics for flower-people" (must be why their logo is a daffodil). However, it was Labour politicians, perhaps sensing the first signs of their fiefdom starting slowly to slip away, who reacted with the most vitriol, in a series of outbursts which made Tony Blair's notorious "Fucking Welsh!" remark sound positively innocuous. A standard tactic was to conflate the *Eisteddfod*-type personal interests of many Plaid representatives with their actual programme for politics. Leo Abse, Labour MP for Pontypool, for instance, derided them for engaging in "the mumbo-jumbo of primitive nationalism", whilst future Labour leader Neil Kinnock claimed they were a bunch of "mournful Druid-fanatics" whose antics merely provided a "bourgeois distraction" from the real business of improving workingmen's lives. Kinnock opined that what most Welsh people truly wanted was better living conditions, not cleaner souls, mocking S4C for broadcasting unwatchable minority-interest fare like "the fascinating story of Roman gold-mining in Dyfed as told in Welsh" instead of the Hollywood Westerns most viewers would actually rather see. [7] *"Land of My Fathers? My Fathers can keep it!"* as Dylan Thomas once said. However, had Kinnock known his history, then he might have been aware that the fields of 'mournful' Druidism and 'sunny' socialism were not quite as incompatible as he supposed...

BARD INFLUENCES

Iolo Morganwg is most famous today as the founder of the *Gorsedd*, the 'rediscoverer' (i.e. inventor) of its rituals, and the 'preserver' (i.e. forger) of various old Welsh poetic texts. Whilst many of his claims were as false as his name – he was christened Edward Williams – he was undoubtedly an influential figure. Iolo first came to public attention in 1789 when a letter appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine* presenting him as the last of the old Welsh bards, a tradition into which he had supposedly been initiated by a secret congress of Wales's final few remaining Druids sometime beforehand – shades of Gerald Gardner's equally dubious claims about the origins of Wicca. A stonemason by trade, Iolo's basic idea was that the ancient Welsh Druidic religion had secretly survived both the Roman conquest and the spread of Christianity, preserving intact an old mystical philosophy centring on the twin doctrines of reincarnation and so-called 'circles of existence' emanating out from the Otherworld. Whatever the truth of Iolo's philosophy, it has its own inherent appeal as an interesting fusion of Neoplatonic thinking with native Welsh lore, which proved influential and plausible to certain scholars of the later 'Celtic Revival' like Evans-Wentz.[8] In 1791, hearing a rumour that a tribe of Welsh-speaking Indians had been found in America (see Simon Young, 'Indian Jones', **FT168:28-31**), Iolo determined to set out on an expedition to find them, the likely privations of which he sought to prepare for by attempting to 'live off the land' as he thought the ancient Druids had done, sleeping under hedges and eating grass and plants – or "grazing" like a cow, as he put it. This proved too much for Iolo's stomach, though, and he never did set out to find Ivor the Injun' after all.

Thus much is well known. Less so are Iolo's radical political beliefs. Back in his imaginary Druid-land of pre-Roman Wales, Iolo located not only a lost religion but also a lost social Utopia. Developing his own version of English radicals' 'Norman Yoke' theory, which held that the Norman Conquest had abolished a previous and highly democratic Saxon constitution and replaced it with tyranny, Iolo started to question the legitimacy of Westminster's rule. As such, he began styling himself the 'Bard of Liberty', mixing with revolutionary figures like Tom Paine and opposing slavery. When his brothers died, he declined to accept the legacy they left him in their wills as he knew they had owned slaves in the West Indies, and during a brief spell as a grocer he refused to sell any sugar sourced from the Caribbean, advertising the sweet stuff he did retail as being 'Uncontaminated With Human Gore', an early Fair Trade slogan you rarely see on chocolate-bars nowadays. Disapproving of Empire, Iolo also made unsuccessful efforts to undermine the East India Company's trade by scattering tea-plant seeds behind him on his journeys through Wales, hoping to provide the basis for a domestic crop (Proper Tea is theft, you see). It was no surprise, then, that when Iolo held his first *Gorsedd* on London's Primrose Hill in 1792 the police intervened, thinking it was somehow associated with the French Revolution; nor that when he later held another such ceremony near Cardiff, the paranoid authorities thought it was an attempt to signal to French ships and trigger invasion.[9]

Even more radical was the legendary Dr William Price who, following the death of

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TOP: William Price photographed in some of his Druidical attire, 1884. **ABOVE:** Dr Price in full Druid regalia (including his fox fur hat) with a pair of goats, Oil painting by AC Hemming, 1918.

ABOVE LEFT: The cremation of William Price on a pyre made up of two tonnes of coal, 31 January 1893.

Iolo's son Taliesin in 1847, claimed to have inherited the status of 'Archdruid of Wales', though it seems more likely his true inheritance was insanity, his father being an ordained clergyman who bathed fully-clothed in ponds, kept snakes in his pockets, and spat on stones in the misguided belief it would improve their value. Dr Price himself was just as odd, a bizarre shamanic-type figure who wore a dead fox on his head, donned a bright red pyjama-like outfit covered with equally colourful green letters, and made absurd claims about the superiority of Welsh culture over that of all other lands. He proclaimed in letters to newspapers that all ancient Greek literature was really Welsh, and that "Homer was born in the hamlet of Y Van near Caerphili. He built Caerphili Castle... The oldest books of the Chinese confess the fact!!" One 'fact' contained only in a book of Price's own, though, 1871's *The Will of My Father*, was that the Universe was actually a giant egg, a thesis slightly scrambled by being written in a language of Price's own invention.[10]

Price, though, was also an early proto-socialist, who aped not only Iolo's spiritual leanings, but also his radical tendencies. A qualified physician, he spent time as chief surgeon at a chain-works in Pontypridd, where he realised the workers of the world really did have nothing to lose but their chains. Ultimately Price associated himself with Chartism,[11] giving speeches quoting Tom Paine and saying things like "Oppression, injustice and the grinding poverty which burdens our lives must be abolished for all time... Remember that freedom is our birthright... We are the descendants of valiant Welshmen and we must be worthy of the traditions which they have passed on to us" – even if those 'traditions', like Iolo's putative prehistoric Welsh Utopia, were entirely invented. Allegedly, Price used his industrial connections to get hold of seven cannon from factory workers, and was implicated in the famous Newport Rising of 1839, when thousands of Chartists, many of them impoverished coal-miners, marched on the Monmouthshire town in armed rebellion, leading to 22 deaths when the forewarned authorities ordered troops to fire on them.

Whilst Price's involvement in the revolt was exaggerated, its true leaders were initially sentenced to be hanged, drawn and quartered (in 1839!), and Price thought it expedient to flee to Paris disguised as a woman. Here he met the anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and visited the Louvre, where he found an ancient stone filled with puzzling inscriptions that Price alone could decipher. Surprisingly, they contained a message to him from an ancient bard named Alun, declaring that a great man would one day emerge to lead the Welsh people out from under English rule... that great man obviously being Price himself. Back home, few believed the New Messiah's message, but he still refused to recognise the laws of capitalist Englishmen, becoming involved in a series of laughable lawsuits in which he introduced his infant daughter as his 'learned counsel' to show how little respect he had for the law of the land. The only law Price really recognised was that of the ancient Druid Utopia, hence the case he once pursued claiming ownership of a large Welsh estate on the twin grounds that Druids had once reputedly owned it and that, as Archdruid, he had official "Authority... to govern the world." Most famously, Price ended up in the dock in 1884 after burning the corpse of his baby son Iesu Grist (Jesus Christ) on top of a hill, a trial which ultimately led to the specific legalisation of cremation in Britain, and thus a triumph of ancient Welsh bardic law over modern Christian English law, in his view.[12] In January 1893 Price fell ill, took to his bed, asked for a glass of bubbly – and then promptly died, the original champagne-socialist. FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

SD TUCKER is a regular contributor to FT whose books include *Paranormal Merseyside*, *Terror of the Tokoloshe*, *The Hidden Folk* and *Great British Eccentrics* His latest, *Forgotten Science*, is available now from Amberley Publishing.

NOTES

Eisteddfod = Competitive Welsh festival of literature, music, poetry, etc, supposedly based on ancient tradition. There are actually several such things, but what I refer to as the *Eisteddfod* throughout is the 'National Eisteddfod of Wales', held once a year in a varying location.

Gorsedd = Gathering of modern-day bards or Druids, often at an *Eisteddfod*, these bards being nominated as such for their contributions either to literature or national life.

1 WY Evans-Wentz, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*, 2008, BiblioBazaar, pp39-41.

2 Another official idiom of Welsh politics is apparently Klingon – an answer in that 'language' was recently given to a Welsh Assembly member who dared ask a question about UFO-sightings near Cardiff airport. See *The Times*, 11 July 2015.

3 Dominic Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, 2013, Penguin, pp510-513, 765-768; Wales *does* now have its own National Assembly, of course, whether it wants it or not.

4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gwynfor_Evans.

5 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Plaid_Cymru.

6 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/2172918.stm; http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/147017.stm; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ron_Davies_(Welsh_politician); Mr Davies did actually later join Plaid himself. The political allegiance of his 'badgers' remains unknown.

7 All quotes cited in Sandbrook, 2013, p513.

8 Evans-Wentz, 2005, pp405-407, provides a useful summary of this non-Wagnerian 'ring cycle', whilst on p437 Evans-Wentz says of Iolo's writings that, though he is aware of the accusations of forgery, he is willing to suspend disbelief and still accept them somehow as being 'authentically Celtic'.

9 John Michell, *Eccentric Lives and Peculiar Notions*, 1984, Thames and Hudson, pp123-129; www.sslh.org.uk/perch/resources/chartism-mag-7-october-2014-1.pdf.

10 Namely, a doctored form of ancient Welsh which Price claimed was the 'true' one.

11 A 19th-century mass political movement demanding various electoral reforms relating to widening of the franchise, more regular elections, reform of the old constituency-boundaries, etc.

12 Michell, 1984, pp129-134; Dean Powell, *Dr William Price: Wales' First Radical*, 2014, Amberley, Ch V; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Price_(physician); http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newport_Rising; http://www.sslh.org.uk/perch/resources/chartism-mag-7-october-2014-1.pdf

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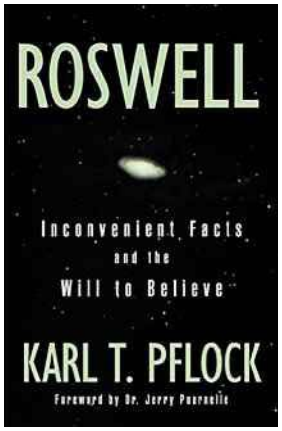
12. CRASH IN HAND

If you're determined, as a good fortean should be, to ponder every side of the claim that a flying saucer from outer space crashed near Roswell, New Mexico, in July 1947, there is much essential reading for you to do. The most informative approach, we suggest, is to start by reading, in chronological order, the books that stake that claim: *The Roswell Incident* (1980) by Charles Berlitz and William Moore (with unacknowledged research by Stanton Friedman); *UFO Crash at Roswell* (1991) by Kevin Randle and Donald Schmitt; *Crash at Corona* (1992) by Stanton Friedman; *The Truth About the UFO Crash at Roswell* (1994) by Randle and Schmitt; *The Day after Roswell* (1997) by Philip Corso. This last is generally regarded as a fantasy, as is the section on Roswell in Annie Jacobsen's *Area 51* (2011). This doesn't mean that other crash-proponents should be taken without salt: alert readers will observe subtle, and not-so-subtle, shifts of emphasis and relegations of previous 'revelations' as the story evolves from author to author over the years. These developments are delineated and analysed in Benson Saler, Charles Ziegler and Charles Moore's *UFO Crash at Roswell: The Genesis of a Modern Myth* (1997), which tabulates how the legend changes and formerly star witnesses are discredited. If you want a *really* fat tome on the subject, there is the massive US Air Force report by Richard Weaver and James McAndrew, *The Roswell Report: Fact Versus Fiction in the New Mexico Desert* (1995), which was followed by McAndrews' *Roswell Report: Case Closed* (1997). This is hardly the end of the Roswell story: argument rumbles on today – on the mad hand, the recent 'Roswell Slides' fiasco, and on the more optimistic one, the attempts to decipher the telegram held by Brig. Gen. Roger Ramey, as seen in one of the photos of the Roswell wreckage. If history is any guide, debate, polite or acrimonious, on the case will probably continue as long as ufology is alive. The above volumes apart, the *one* book we'd say is essential for the fundamental fortean bookshelf is Karl T Pflock's *Roswell: Inconvenient Facts and the Will to Believe* (2001). And here is why.



Karl Tomlinson Pflock (1943–2006) was an eclectic among ufologists. He was, for instance, long associated with the late gossip-monger and *de facto* sceptic Supreme Commander James Moseley, whose autobiography *Shockingly Close to the Truth!* he ghost-wrote, and to whose mocking scandal sheet *Saucer Smear* he contributed. This, by association, did not entirely endear him to mainstream ufology, since Moseley chronically failed to take the subject as solemnly as it took (takes) itself. On the other hand, Pflock believed that extraterrestrials, in their 'flying saucers', had visited Earth from the late 1940s, then departed sometime in the early 1970s. As far as we know he never gave a detailed explanation of why he believed this. During that quarter century or so, he considered, they abducted Betty and Barney Hill in New Hampshire. This seems to have been the one abduction account in which Pflock had any faith: in private, he was scathing about the 'evidence' produced by the abduction industry that sprang up in the 1980s. His greatest heresy among 'serious researchers', however, was his wholesale rejection of the canonical notion that the 1947 Roswell Incident involved a crashed flying saucer. This wasn't a position he adopted easily, as his book shows. He started out as at least willing to believe the story, and for a while endorsed Glenn Dennis, the Roswell funeral director who claimed he had firm direct and indirect evidence that little alien bodies had been recovered from a crashed UFO in July 1947 – and in due course was thoroughly debunked. But as Pflock, over eight years of research, tracked the mutating evidence, he found a mounting case for the essentially mundane cause of the Roswell affair.

Pflock knew he had an uphill battle. As he wryly says in his introductory chapter: "The Roswell 'mystery' now sustains a virtual mini-industry… with a colourful and voluble cast of True Believers and True Unbelievers and, of late, the New Witness of the Month Parade." Not a lot, we may add, has changed in that respect in the 15 years since Pflock published his book. The lapse of time, however, does not affect his core argument or the analysis he offers: in overall effect it represents a yardstick for approaching all the claims that have surfaced since. The key problem with such an old case is the accuracy of witnesses' recall. A larger problem is that proponents tend to talk about *hundreds* of witnesses to a crashed UFO and its deceased crew: but strip out the hearsay and rumour, and Pflock reveals that we're left with 23 "who are known, claim, or can be reasonably thought to have seen physical evidence" of the crash. But: "Of these, only seven have asserted that what they saw had unusual properties or exhibited something else suggestive of otherworldly origins." And some of those approach a state of flakiness. Pflock approaches this difficulty with a certain oblique tact, beginning his exposition with fairly deadpan accounts of the history of the case as it evolved through the accounts noted above, pausing from time to time to pick details apart. We soon learn that what is reported in the canonical books is often somewhat at odds with what witnesses report in his own interviews with them. This indicates either that the witnesses' memories are erratic, or that writers with a powerful 'will to believe' have distorted their accounts. Warning lights begin to flash.

Pflock devotes a hilarious chapter to star witness Frank Kaufmann (and pseudonyms), whom he interviewed at length in May 1993. In our brief account here, Kaufmann has to stand as the exemplar of many others whose credibility Pflock quietly but firmly demolishes – and, along with that, the reliability of their backers. Or to put it another way, he exposes the gullibility and (to be blunt) the intellectual laziness of the Roswell proponents. Kaufmann was vague, it seems,

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: Major Jesse Marcel in June 1947 posing with that famous debris.

about his exact rôle (beyond 'intelligence operative') or rank in the USAAF – details whose actuality no 'Roswell' advocate seems to have bothered to check – but he helped confuse the issue as to whether there was just one, or two, saucer crashes that fateful night – one on the Brazel ranch, another near Corona on the Plains of San Augustin. Kaufmann plumped for being a witness to the Corona crash. He expounds on a mysterious team called 'the Nine', called from their day jobs allegedly to lead investigations into such oddities as Roswell. Naturally, Kaufman was a member of this elect, select group, as was, for some reason, aviator Charles Lindbergh.

The Nine, Kaufmann said, were the only ones permitted on the crash site, but in the next breath reveals that four "medical MPs" were called in to retrieve the alien corpses and heave them off-site in lead-lined body bags – although no radiation had been detected. (We assume such body bags did actually exist in the military inventory.) Then supposedly about 100 "special duty" MPs arrived from Kirtland AAF (a mere 175 miles/280km away by crow), to clear the site, working in 20-man details. "Brilliant tactics," Pflock remarks drily of this less-than-costive security arrangement. Meanwhile, in another miracle of logistics, at Roswell AAF, a pathologist arrived from Fort Bliss (150 miles/240km distant) and a doctor from Chicago, no less (about 1,200 miles/1,930km away), to examine the bodies. All manner of flights with cadavers, wreckage and the main body of the craft were dispatched hither and yon, some of them "diversions" (decoying what or whom?). The main chunk of wreckage measured about 25ft by 15ft by 5ft (8 x 4.6 x 1.5m), according Kaufmann. No aircraft in service in the world could carry a payload that size. A particularly surreal and pointless detail: Kaufmann was aboard a B-25 accompanying some bodies to Wright Field (which incidentally had no significant medical facilities). The bomber touched down at Andrews AAF, near Washington DC, so that some VIPs, who he hinted included President Harry S Truman and General Dwight Eisenhower, could take a peek at the reeking, deteriorating corpses (unzipping their lead-lined bags, presumably). Now here's the really weird bit. Once landed at Wright Field, the B-25 pulled into a hangar, whereupon the crew and Kaufmann were bundled into an identical B-25 – "right down to the tail number" – and flew back to Roswell. Why so, he did not say.

> "LITERATURE IS A LUXURY; FICTION IS A NECESSITY."
>
> *GK Chesterton*

But here is Mr Kaufmann in full flow. After sketching the craft as he saw it, he said: "You look at that, that looks just like—you know the stealth bomber? Well, that's what came from this… Also… if you touch it with the human hand, it loses its effectiveness, just like with the stealth aircraft." Pflock can find no more to say than: "Okay." As one might, if one were not so tactless as to choke on one's Coke.

And so it goes on, implausibility piled upon improbability heaped upon impossibility. According to the official record, Kaufmann had left military service in 1945, after a distinguished career as a personnel clerk, in which occupation he continued as a civilian. Great cover, of course, for a top-notch 'intelligence operative'. Kaufmann failed to make that point.

Pflock covers all the Roswell bases, to speak, as known in 2001, and concludes, as is now conventional sceptical wisdom, that a Project Mogul balloon train was responsible for all the fuss. He might have spent a few more pages covering the Santilli alien-autopsy film, particularly the back-story involving 'cameraman Jack', which sounded just about plausible unless one looked at a map and, more to the point, was aware of the route and the state of the roads he allegedly travelled by truck to get to the crash site. While this may seem old hat now, it wasn't then, and the 'cameraman's' story and its disassembly are remarkably revealing about the workings of ufological research. That said, even viewers only half-informed about pathologists' *modus operandi* would know at first viewing that the film was hokum.

Naturally, Roswell-crash supporters did not take too well to having their holy grail so comprehensively besmirched and, worse, by one of their own number (Pflock, we recall, started out as an advocate of there being *something* extraordinary involved). One of the most trenchant criticisms of his book appeared in *International UFO Reporter* for Spring 2001, by Robert Durant (online at: www.cufos.org/Roswell/durant.pdf). Durant's pivotal objection is that Pflock announces – well into his analysis, incidentally – that 'anomalous' testimony can safely be ignored henceforth. Given the way he had by then shown that those offering such testimony are fantasists, fabulists, victims of false or confused memory, and in some cases proven liars, this seems a reasonable way to proceed. Durant, it seems to us, also misses the underlying and oft-repeated point of the book, which was to encourage greater honesty, acuity, objectivity and scrupulousness in ufological research. Pflock, after all, believed that aliens in flying saucers *had* visited the Earth. He wasn't pissing in the ufological soup: he was trying to purify it, and intensify its flavour. FT

Karl T Pflock, *Roswell: Inconvenient Facts and the Will to Believe*, Prometheus Books 2001.

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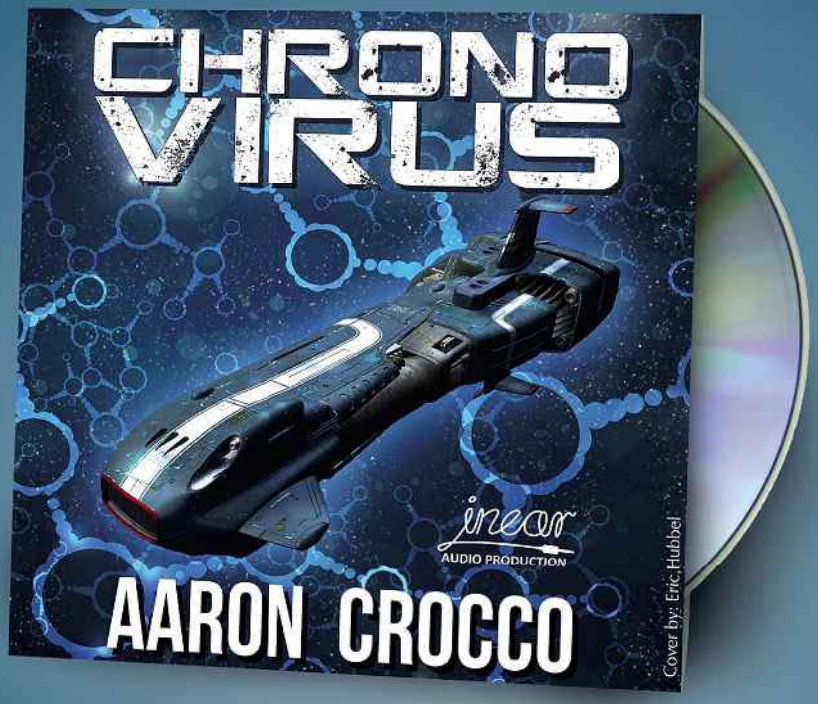

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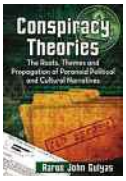

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Historian Aaron John Gulyas's new book, cumbersomely titled *Conspiracy Theories: The Roots, Themes, and Propagation of Paranoid Political and Cultural Narratives*, explores conspiracy theories throughout history, lucidly delineating their contexts and themes, and the ways in which these theories have been disseminated through, for example, feature films, literature, journalism, and late night television and radio talk shows.

This book aims to "determine the point at which the commonly accepted and documented historical record becomes unable to bear the weight of sensationalism." For example, when did the revelations of the CIA's MK ULTRA programme devolve into conspiratorial beliefs that, in one theory, individuals were being made CIA sex slaves for political and cultural elites?

Gulyas here presents a selective sampling of what he calls "representative themes", concentrating primarily on the development of conspiracy theories in the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate era of the United States.

Forteans will be most interested in Gulyas's exploration of the influence of Nazi occultists, and how their alleged concerns with secret weapons, underground bases and mind control informed current popular conspiracy theories in the US and elsewhere.

His text acts as a helpful guide to the often complex interweaving of political subversion, secret societies, religious paranoia, and occultism (predominantly the Illuminati and the Freemasons) that paved the way for contemporary esoteric and paranoid theories – by David Icke and others – concerning the "evil forces bent on our spiritual destruction" and world domination, among other evil objectives.

This world domination, or New World Order, became more political, Gulyas contends, following WWII and the development of the UN (and later the Council on Foreign Relations and Bilderberger organisations) to counter the threat posed by a global Communist agenda. John D Rockefeller and US President Franklin D Roosevelt were viewed as part of a Jewish plot to control the world economy via the implementation of false political and economic crises. Gulyas addresses the infamous 'Garden Plot', a plan to prevent government disruption in the face of global catastrophe – most likely a Soviet nuclear attack – and the Ruby Ridge and Waco events, wherein Federal law enforcement seemingly ignored constitutional civil rights and used deadly force in the face of active resistance.

Perhaps the purest representation of the paranoid, anti-government, anti-New World Order conspiracist, and

> **"Banal realities can be reworked into baroque theories. It is folklore in the making"**

an excellent illustration of the slippage between these conspiracies and those of a more esoteric variety – for example, extraterrestrial invasion and subsequent government cover-ups of the alien presence on Earth – is that of Bill Cooper, who brings together many disparate yet omnipresent conspiratorial strands. Cooper – once a key figure among the UFO crowd, with his dramatic stories of secret underground bases, hybrid alien programmes (derived primarily from the Paul Bennewitz affair and propagated by John Lear), and battles between aliens and the US Army – easily developed into a more generalised right-wing anti-government activist, which ultimately resulted in his untimely death when he was shot down during a confrontation with Federal agents.

Gulyas uses Cooper to shift from politically themed conspiracies to a discussion of more otherworldly and mysterious – and fortean – topics. The government cover-up of extraterrestrials, for instance, derived from George Adamski and Donald Keyhoe's 'Silence Group' of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as from Albert K Bender and Gray Barker's darkly paranoid vision of the shadowy Men in Black (1953–1962), who may or may not have been government agents, to the "Cosmic Watergate" (the phrase is Stanton Friedman's) of Roswell and MJ-12. Many of the conspiracies that developed in the wake of these events had their source, notably, among low-level employees of the US Air Force and agencies which did their best to circulate and foster conspiracy theories among the UFO community, largely to cover up rather more prosaic technological secrets. These theories were eventually expanded and cultivated by the likes of Bennewitz, Lear, and Cooper.

Gulyas traces the somewhat organic development of these themes, providing a case history of how banal political, military, and economic realities can be misconstrued, misinterpreted and reworked into baroque and fascinating – yet ultimately fantastical – theories. It is folklore in the making.

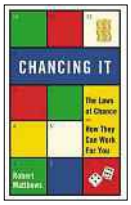
The underground bases that provide an important backdrop to these theories represent, Gulyas contends, a "forbidden knowledge" theme among conspiracists, wherein scientific and technological elites work in secret to develop new technologies, and to spread what particularly right-wing conspiracy theorists view as questionable scientific claims (such as global warming) in order to achieve – and maintain – certain economic and social political controls.

Indeed, Gulyas here examines the faux documentary *Alternative 3*, and especially, the late conspiracy writer Jim Keith's reaction to the documentary, published in 1993 under the title *Casebook on Alternative*

Continued on page 58

Luck be a lady

Two useful approaches to debunking the logical errors most of us commit



Chancing It

The Laws of Chance and How They Can Work For You

Robert Matthews

Profile Books 2016
Hb, 282pp, notes, £14.99, ISBN 9781781250303

Chance

The Science and Secrets of Luck, Randomness and Probability

Ed Michael Brooks

Profile Books 2015
Pb, 266pp, ind, £7.99, ISBN 9781781255438

Humans respond to their environment using intuition, gut feelings and rules of thumb; these cope with most things daily life throws at you, but don't equip you to get to grips with risk, chance and statistics. This lies at the root of many logical errors believers and sceptics commit when they confront the more unusual aspects of reality.

These books, in their different ways, attempt to address this. Matthews takes the more direct route, looking at how key elements of the laws of chance *actually* work as opposed to how we *assume* they work. For example, the Law of Averages is about the relative frequency of potential outcomes rather than the actual number of occurrences. You need to consider how often something occurred and divide this by how often it had the opportunity to do so. He's also good at using real-life examples to bust logical traps such as *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. Just because one thing happens immediately after something else doesn't automatically mean that one caused the other. This fallacy is at the root of modern vaccine scares and has application in some fortean contexts as well. Coincidences surprise us because we think they are very unlikely so can't just be a fluke, but *we* decide what is amazing and that isn't objective. We also assume the variables affecting a coincidence are independent, which is probably not the case *and* affects how likely the occurrence is. These can influence our perceptions of clusters of incidents, particularly as most people assume randomness to be smooth and even – true randomness has no pattern and can result in uneven patches and clusters to which we attribute meaning. Statistical traps lurk in how we interpret medical advice – a two per cent increase in the chance of cancer is meaningless unless you know what the original percentage was. The un-numbered green slots on a roulette wheel look innocuous enough until you run the numbers, then you realise they are crucial for tipping the odds in favour of the house.

Matthews is great at unpicking these pitfalls and summarising them at the end of each chapter, making this an excellent handbook for addressing the seemingly illogical logic of chance, though the book would have benefited from an index.

Michael Brooks's volume covers much the same territory, but as a series of essays from *New Scientist* contributors. It is inevitably less succinct, but it is also further-reaching – his contributors discuss the role of chance in quantum mechanics, neurobiology and behavioural sciences. This makes it an excellent companion to *Chancing It*, balancing that book's detail with the wider view.

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict
DETAILED OR BROAD-BRUSH? YOU CHOOSE, BUT BOTH ARE GOOD **9**

Continued from previous page

3: Secret Societies and World Control (reprinted in 2005 as *Mind Control and UFOs: Casebook on Alternative 3*), and argues that, despite the fictiveness of the documentary, its themes of "environmental collapse, government cover-ups, and a plot to save the elite at the expense of the masses" were "documented facts". Indeed, what else is one to make of all the recent scientific interest in colonising Mars?

Finally, Gulyas touches on the perennial fortean subject of the Hollow Earth theory, which first achieved widespread exposure via Shaver's 'articles', published in Ray Palmer's pulp magazine *Amazing Stories* in the 1940s. The Hollow Earth theory helped to shape later government conspiracies of UFO cover-ups and underground bases. The latter derived from actual post-war construction of underground facilities meant to house nuclear weapons or waste, or to hide certain military secrets from Russian satellites. Inside these underground bases, the conspiracists claim, occurs everything from the alien hybridisation programmes, operations bases for cattle and sheep mutilations, and the storage of those mysterious black helicopters.

In the end, the root cause of all conspiracy thinking, Gulyas proposes, is fear, nominally a "fear of subjugation" to tyrannical forces, a tyranny that financial and global elites in all their woeful self-interest, and attempts to exert power and control throughout history up to and including the present, do little to dispel.

This book is a welcome guide for comprehending where these conspiracies depart from fact. What Gulyas helps the reader to understand is that, finally, the world is not as orderly as the conspiracy theorists would have it, and that revelation is cold comfort indeed.

Eric Hoffman

Fortean Times Verdict
THE WORLD IS NOT AS ORDERLY AS CONSPIRACISTS BELIEVE… **7**

The Unique Legacy of Weird Tales

The Evolution of Modern Fantasy and Horror

Eds: Justin Everett & Jeffrey H Shanks

Rowman & Littlefield 2015
Hb, 245pp, illus ind, bib, PRICE? ISBN 9781442256217

The interwar period saw the development of new types of fantastic literature that would eventually become the modern genres of fantasy and horror. The most famous author of this era is, of course, H P Lovecraft, whose work has been embraced not only by horror and science fiction fans but also by occultists and academic philosophers. However, this volume focuses not so much on Lovecraft – although naturally he does appear – but on the milieu within which his work and that of his contemporaries appeared, particularly *Weird Tales*.

Justin Everett and Jeffrey H Shanks identify *Weird Tales* not just as a pulp magazine but as a "discourse community", an environment in which writers and readers influenced each other toward the shared goal of providing a home for fiction that no longer fits within the literary mainstream.

The papers in this volume are divided into three parts. The first, 'The Unique Magazine: Weird Tales, Modernism and Genre Formation', deals with the relationship between weird fiction and the high modernism which was emerging as the dominant literary culture of the era. Jason Ray Carney, Jonas Prida, Dániel Nyikos, Nicole Emmelhainz and Morgan T Holmes look at different ways in which the fiction published in *Weird Tales* challenges our conception of the differences between 'high' and 'low' literary culture in this period as well as how the unique creative and collaborative processes produced genres that are core parts of modern fantastic fiction, such as sword-and-sorcery.

The second selection of papers deal with the two best-known writers to come out of *WeirdTales*: Clancy Smith, Bobby Derie,

Jeffrey H Shanks and Justin Everett explore various aspects of the works of Lovecraft and Robert E Howard. Topics include sexuality in Lovecraft, Howard's knowledge of contemporary eugenic theory, and more.

Finally, the third part of the book deals with other *Weird Tales* authors: Scott Connors and Geoffrey Reiter cover Clark Ashton Smith, Jonathan Helland writes about C L Moore (and artist Margaret Brundage), Paul W Shovlin discusses madness in the fiction of Robert Bloch and Sidney Sondergard discusses the 'pulp metafiction' of Harold Lawlor.

Like any edited volume of academic papers, *The Unique Legacy of Weird Tales* is a mixed bag. Some of the papers cover ground familiar to Lovecraft buffs, but the analysis of *Weird Tales* as a publishing phenomenon is valuable. The idea of the pulp magazine (this pulp magazine, anyway) as discourse community has interesting parallels for other forms of media existing between mass-market success and critical respectability. In general, the papers on less-studied writers like Moore are more likely to stand out.

Because each paper has to be able to stand alone, readers who tackle it in one go will find the same account of *Weird Tales*' origins several times. Like the varied nature of the contents, this is a consequence of the format.

The Unique Legacy of Weird Tales is a fascinating portrait of an important period in cultural history. The creative environment of the magazine and its associated fan culture influenced not only modern fictional genres but also the weird subcultures that have always been intertwined with them. This volume is well worth a look for the student of weird fiction – or of American literary history in general – but may be a little academic for the more casual Lovecraft fan.

James Holloway

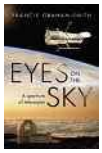
Fortean Times Verdict
WEIRD FICTION MEETS LITERARY CULTURE IN A FASCINATING STUDY **8**

Eyes on the Sky

A Spectrum of Telescopes

Francis Graham-Smith

Oxford University Press 2016
Hb, xvi + 236 pp, £25.00, ISBN 9780198734277



A century ago, the scientist Oliver Lodge developed a fascination with things that couldn't be seen. He believed it was possible to communicate with the spirits of the dead, and he also believed the Sun and other stars produced radio waves that ought to be detectable by a sufficiently sensitive receiver. He was never able to prove the first assertion, which still lies firmly in the fortean domain. He was unsuccessful with the second, too, but soon after his death the development of radio astronomy – as well as telescopes operating in many other "invisible" parts of the electromagnetic spectrum – proved that Lodge had been right all along. But just because an idea has graduated from the speculative realm into the scientific mainstream doesn't make it any less interesting. Almost everything we know about the Universe beyond the Earth comes from astronomical telescopes of one form or another.

A former professor of radio astronomy, director of the Royal Greenwich Observatory and Astronomer Royal, Sir Francis Graham-Smith is ideally qualified to write about this subject. Focusing on history rather than technical details, the book covers everything from optical, infra-red and X-ray telescopes to giant interferometric arrays and orbiting observatories. Now 93 years old, Graham-Smith witnessed many of the developments he describes at first hand.

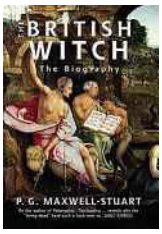
If he has a weakness, it's his habit of using astronomical jargon without properly explaining it, which may confuse readers who don't already know something about the subject. For those who do, however, it's an enjoyable and informative read.

Andrew May

Fortean Times Verdict
THE STORY OF MODERN TELESCOPES TOLD BY AN INSIDER **8**

Witch dreams

The murder of supposed witches had many justifications – including visions



The British Witch

The Biography

PG Maxwell-Stuart

Amberley 2016
Pb, 470pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £10.99, ISBN 9781445655437

Historians and researchers of the topic come to no agreement on the number of witches killed during the pogrom against them that raged across Europe. While the majority of the estimates range between 50 and 60 thousand, and the nimbers fall in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, the documentary evidence for executions in the 13th century and before are thin; and there is disagreement too over what defined a crime punishable by torture and death. The biggest variable is the definition of witchcraft itself, as, for example, many of those murdered by Matthew Hopkins – England's 'Witchfinder General' c.1644–47 – were midwives or simple local healers; and the famous Pendle witches of Lancashire (of whom 10 were executed) might simply have been the casualties of a feud between two lawless families.

In any case an approximate figure for English deaths in that main period was 500. Of actual practising witches we know almost nothing, but assuming an indigenous Margaret Murray style cult, the actual numbers of witches might be many times larger. Maxwell-Stuart's dense study (small type on 470 thin pages) is a re-issue of his well-received 2014 edition. In line with modern historians of the subject (eg. Hutton, Midelfort, etc), his early chapters chart the historical, social, religious and political forces which shaped the social, psychological and mythological landscape in which the various ideas of witchcraft, helpful as well as harmful, were born and flourished.

Maxwell-Stuart – a historian at the University of St Andrews – begins his story in the early 13th century and shows how, by the time the great pogroms kicks off two centuries later, there were prognosticators, soothsayers, astrologers, herbalists, seers, diviners, makers of talismans and charms, fortune-tellers, exorcists etc, and healers of all sorts, throughout the land and at all social levels. The remarkable wealth of detail is recovered from transcripts of trials and inquiries, but this only becomes available from around the mid-17th century onwards and reveals the strength of superstition in the service of envy, greed, fear, grievance and other prime motives… not to mention the terrible scourge of 'spectral evidence' (whereby someone could be implicated simply by appearing in someone else's dream). Maxwell-Stuart shows us the effects on society (in different periods) of the belief in witchcraft, especially in the later period, up to the repeal of witchcraft as a crime in 1735. Throughout it all, witches were, on the whole, simple poor untutored women (and their families) who bore the brunt of the largely misogynistic Church, judiciary and 'learned men'.

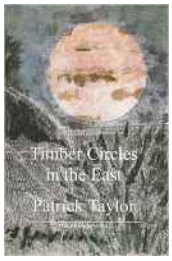
The thorough research behind Maxwell-Stuart's sympathetic and clear exposition does not prevent this from being a gripping read… and an essential one for anyone seeking an understanding of the complex issues of the period and subject.

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict
FINE STUDY OF WITCHCRAFT FROM THE MIDDLE AGES ONWARDS **9**

Wood henges

Prehistoric circles weren't always stone, as this book on eastern henges stresses



Timber Circles in the East

Patrick Taylor

Polystar Press 2015

Pb, 120pp, illus, ref, £8.95, ISBN 1907154604

Surprisingly, all of Britain's 1,300 stone circles are situated west of a line running from Whitby to the Isle of Wight. Any monuments east of this line were built of timber. Independent researcher Patrick Taylor has studied East Anglian timber circles for some years: this admirable volume is a collection of his papers, previously published separately. And what a revelation!

Apart from the well-known 'Seahenge' (*pictured below*), the prehistoric monuments of eastern England have been largely ignored. This is understandable, since none can be seen today – their timbers rotted away millennia ago and any traces found by 'rescue archæology' are now buried beneath roads and housing developments.

Taylor's exploration of the astronomical alignments is especially interesting. On the south side of Norwich, for instance, is the Arminghall Henge, discovered as a cropmark by aerial photography in 1929. Inside the henge was a horseshoe arrangement of eight large posts, resembling the centre of Stonehenge. About half a mile away is another cropmark, the double-concentric Markshall Circle – still unexcavated and rapidly being eroded by ploughing. A line drawn between the two monuments points south-west to where, at winter solstice, the setting sun rolls down the side of a shallow eminence known as Chapel Hill. It's not the most spectacular sun-roll in the world, but Norwich is not known for its mountain scenery. Timber circles are often associated with vast, Neolithic monumental complexes that are found all around Britain. Sited on low-lying floodplains, often close to river estuaries, they may have cursuses, raised linear features that can be several miles long. Conical, flat-topped mounds – miniature Silburys created by piling up layers of river mud – are another frequent component. Until reading this book, I had not thought to even look for any of these features in eastern England.

Timber Circles in the East is a valuable resource, but if an impartial editor had ironed out its various flaws it would have been a far better book. Nevertheless, it inspired me to spend several days using my mapping software to explore East Anglia!

Steve Marshall

Fortean Times Verdict

EAST ANGLIA'S PREHISTORIC MONUMENTS REVEALED **6**

The Astronomer and The Witch

Johannes Kepler's Fight for his Mother

Ulinka Rublack

Oxford University Press 2015

Hb, 359pp, ind, illus, notes, £20.00, ISBN 9780198736776

On 29 December 1615, the 44-year-old Johannes Kepler – previously the Imperial Mathematician in the court of the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II – received a letter from his sister. Katharina, Kepler's elderly mother, had been accused of witchcraft by several influential people in Leonberg, the town, now in southern Germany, in which she lived. Kepler had helped lay the foundation for the scientific revolution by discovering that planets moved in ellipses and defining the eponymous three laws of planetary motion. He turned this powerful intellect to his mother's defence during a struggle that lasted six years.

Did he succeed? If you don't know, don't be tempted to Google her fate. Rublack tells the story with a novelist's panache. Even if you know what happened, it's a compelling book. She sketches the vivid details that make the time, place and characters come to life.

Many narratives of the witch-hunting hysteria that swept across Europe tend to focus on the horrifying headline figures. Between 40,000 and 50,000 people were executed for witchcraft in Europe between 1500 and 1700, though any estimate is notoriously unreliable. Yet behind each death lies a story. By focusing on one person, *The Astronomer and The Witch* eloquently and powerfully evokes the mutually reinforcing forces behind the persecution.

Katharina was, for example, a widow, a social status that could evoke hostility. A new local governor was willing to show he was tough against witches. And there were "pervasive cultural fears of old women" who, according to the contemporary view, envied other people's beauty, fertility or wealth and, as a result, wanted to cause them harm. Rublack brilliantly shows how everyday events, minor politics and petty squabbles could, in that frenetic atmosphere, end in the torment of the torture chamber or an agonising death on the bonfire.

Most of the prosecution's evidence is at best circumstantial. Katharina, who made herbal remedies, was accused of brewing poison that made "friends and neighbours mortally ill". Her son Heinrich – who, even allowing for combat stress, seems to have been an unpleasant piece of work – returned home ill and poor in 1614 after 25 years as a soldier. When Katharina couldn't put meat on the table for a meal in the middle of a hard winter, Heinrich lost his temper and called his mother a witch. Unfortunately, others overheard. Katharina supposedly hit a 12-year-old girl on the arm. The pain increased hourly and ended in paralysis.

More suspiciously, Katharina asked the local gravedigger to dig up her father's skull. She wanted to turn the skull into into a drinking vessel for Kepler. It might sound strange, but it was in tune with the times. Indeed, Rudolf II had a penchant for objects with a "magical, mysterious, wise, or witty quality". (Peter Marshall's *The Mercurial Emperor* is an excellent introduction to this idiosyncratic ruler.) During her trial, Katharina said that she had seen these cups in Tübingen, where Kepler studied at the university.

Few witches had an advocate as articulate, intelligent and well connected as Kepler – and so Katharina's case is well documented. By focusing on a single (albeit atypical) case, Rublack offers an insightful perspective on the witch hunts and the vexed issue of religious struggles over what now seems minor details of doctrine, but that triggered the horrors of the Thirty Years War. Rublack says she wrote the "book not just as an attempt to gain a better understanding of individuals, but also of families, a community, and an age". She succeeds admirably.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict

THE TALE OF THE WITCH AND THE MATHEMATICIAN – UNMISSABLE **9**

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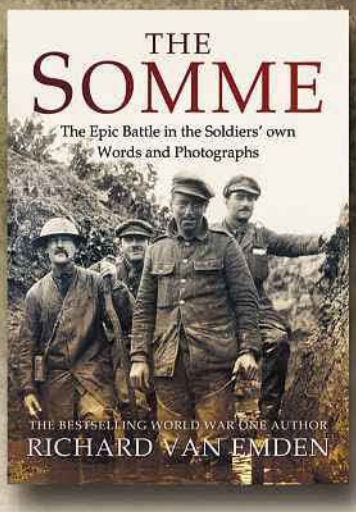
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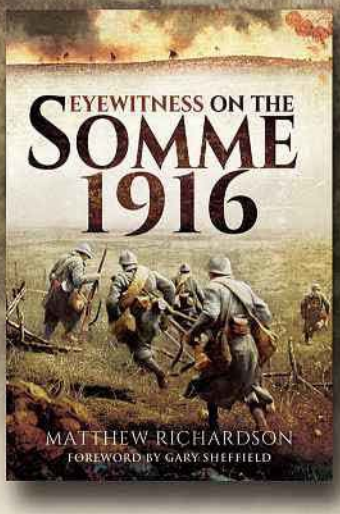

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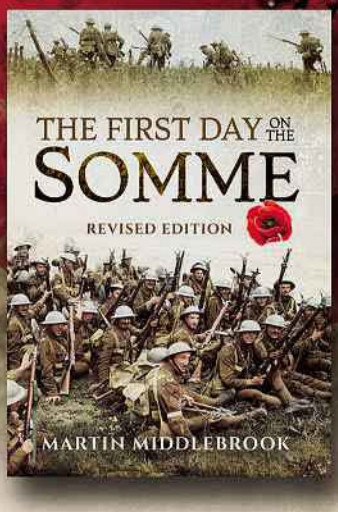

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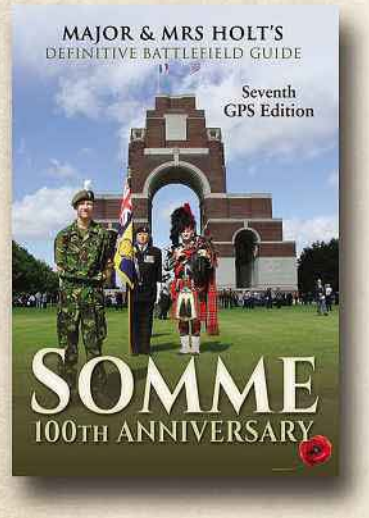

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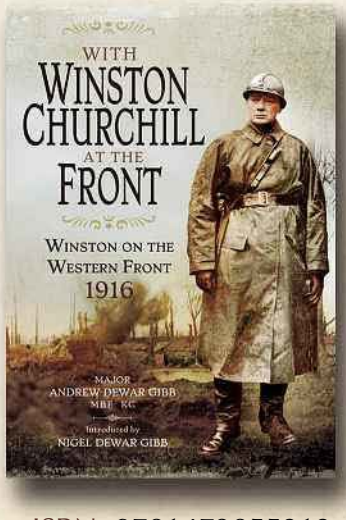

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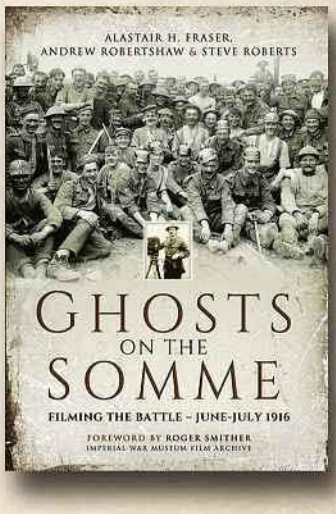

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The Wave

Dir Roar Uthaug, Norway 2015

On UK release from 12 August

Considering the seemingly demonic daisy chain of current apocalyptic events around the world, director Roar Uthaug's *The Wave*, featuring a localised disaster in the cosy, real-life Norwegian village of Geiranger, feels like an escape to a reassuring sanctuary. Unless of course you live in Geiranger and face the very real threat of Arkeneset Mountain, which towers above this and neighbouring villages, collapsing with sudden inescapable devastation into the Geirangerfjord and transforming the picture-postcard waters into an 80-metre high tsunami.

Idun is working her last managerial shifts at the main local tourist hotel, her young daughter Julia is being cute and her teenage son Sondre a sulky arse on a skateboard, while her geologist husband Kristian is busy with his last day on the job. This comes as something of a relief to his fellow geologists monitoring the mountain because Kristian has developed something of a reputation among them for crying wolf whenever there is even a flicker of activity from the sensors embedded behind that mute, massive rockface. And today there is one, although his fellow geologists dismiss his fears. Kristian is about to board the ferry to his new life, but like Jeremy Corbyn, he simply will not go: he must check the data again. Too late. When the siren sounds we are on a 10-minute countdown to watery oblivion.

Uthaug approaches the inevitable tsunami with an implacable building up tension that never loosens its grip. The family dynamics are conveyed so precisely that when peril is upon these people, you care. Ane Dahl Torp's Idun is in nice contrast to Kristoffer Joner's hyperactive Kristian, a cool motherly force clearly to be reckoned with. Both actors underwent extensive underwater training for their roles and the ordeal their characters subsequently undergo is palpable as it unfolds on the screen.

When the tsunami hits, it is realised with a terrifying, in-your-face beauty that takes your breath away. The contracting rock fissure, the deafening warning siren, the nerve-jangling countdown, and the frantic fleeing of the local populace to reach higher ground add up to one of the best set-piece action sequences you will see all year (all accompanied by Magnus Beite's pounding soundtrack of epic fanfares and symphonic Scandi Metal stomp). I was left wondering where on earth they could take the film after the dregs of the tsunami were spent, lapping among the tourist baubles and overturned cars only two thirds through the film's running time. But this is where Idun comes into her own, willing to do anything to protect the life of one of her offspring, the narrative taking a disturbing yet deeply satisfyingly dark turn.

A plot arc containing similarities to that of Pierce Brosnan's volcanologist in *Dante's Peak* means comparisons are as inescapable as the tsunami, but *The Wave* is a less showy affair, offering a much stronger sense of realism yet never at the expense of entertainment. Uthaug blatantly toys with the emotions of the audience throughout, but this is how a watery disaster movie must surely be: you come out of it feeling like you have received a proper physical and emotional soaking.

Nick Cirkovic

Fortean Times Verdict

SUBMERGE YOURSELF IN THIS SUPERIOR DISASTER FLICK **8**

The Childhood of a Leader

Dir Brady Corbet, UK/Hungary/France 2016

On UK release from 19 August

The publicity blurb for American actor Brady Corbet's directorial debut states that it is "an ominous portrait of emerging evil… infused with the same sense of dread as *The Others* and *The Omen*." However, if you go to *The Childhood of a Leader* excitedly anticipating 115 minutes of horripilation and subsequent nightmares, then it will disappoint; this is neither a tense, haunted house yarn, nor the unnerving story of a demonic child sired by one of the seven princes of hell.

If we were not privy to the three sequential 'tantrums' of the child in question, we would assume him quite sweet-natured – if not a little uncomfortable – beneath his Little Lord Fauntleroy locks and blousons. This boy has stepped straight from a Singer Sargent society family portrait, the preternaturally uncommunicative offspring of a preoccupied American diplomat and his equally absent, migraine-stricken wife. The film slowly reveals that, beneath his cherubic appearance, the boy – impressively played by British newcomer Tom Sweet – is manipulating all and sundry with what is clearly emerging as a highly disturbed mind. It first manifests itself in his throwing stones at parishioners after a rehearsal for a nativity play, and each of his ensuing, increasingly histrionic, turns indicates that all is not entirely healthy with the youngster, or his parents. And – as the film's title has forewarned us – he is also going to grow up to become a person of influence.

The boy is certainly somewhat aware of the history-making conversations that are happening around him in the family's echoing, French country house, immediately after the First World War. Daddy and his cigar-chomping, moustachioed cronies are hammering out the Treaty of Versailles and the boy, furious at being mistaken for the umpteenth time for a girl, deliberately wanders semi-clad into their deliberations. It's not exactly a tantrum, nor would it necessarily presage the makings of a totalitarian monster, but daddy's reputation is understandably not best served by his son's entrance, nor his later outburst at the dinner table when he is asked to say grace.

One spends a lot of time wondering – during the long, lingering shots of closed doors, open windows, or servants pottering about the scullery – which of the 20th century's unattractive despots the boy will grow up to be. When his name is revealed late on in the film as (spoiler alert!) Prescott, one also can't help wondering whether the former Labour Member of Parliament for Hull East could really have had such a privileged yet dysfunctional upbringing…

Slow, painfully slow, is the overwhelming modus operandi of Corbet's storytelling style, but the luscious cinematography and production design, and thundering moments of orchestral atonality – courtesy of former 1960s heartthrob turned avant-garde maverick Scott Walker – are nothing if not

memorable. A few appearances by Robert Pattinson may draw in his devoted following of young fans, but one suspects the real entertainment value of the film will be their horrified reaction. In sum, this is not a film bereft of vivid imagination or bold experimentation, but it's clear that Corbet has not yet found his voice. *The Omen* or *The Others* it certainly is not.
Robert Weinberg

Fortean Times Verdict
IMAGINATIVE YET UNINSPIRING PORTRAIT OF A MONSTER **5**

The 9th Life of Louis Drax

Dir Alexandre Aja, US 2016
On UK release from 9 September

The 9th Life of Louis Drax is based on the bestseller by Liz Jensen and directed by Alexandre Aja, director of the film adaptation of Joe Hill's *Horns*. Louis (Aiden Longworth) is a young boy who has a major accident every year, each of which he recovers from, until he seemingly drowns after plunging from a cliff on his ninth birthday. However, two hours after he is pronounced dead, he comes back to life in the morgue, and celebrated pædiatric neurologist Allan Pascal (Jamie Dornan) must solve the mystery of this comatose child, his vanished father (Aaron Paul) and fragile mother (Sarah Gadon).

We delve into Louis's mind to unlock the secrets that might be causing him to remain in a coma, where he surrounds himself with an ocean landscape that serves not only as a comfort blanket woven from his love of all things nautical, but also as a dark and murky place where the things that plague him may be lurking. Dr Pascal tries to figure out what actually happened to Louis, and reaches out to the boy's subconscious to encourage him to wake up. This portion of the film is both intriguing and, at times, darkly humorous. Unfortunately, the decision to also focus on the mother's romantic involvement with Dr Pascal becomes tediously melodramatic, detracting substantially from the overall impact.

While the trailer offered the distinct feel of a thriller with horror elements, this unsettling tone is not achieved in the film itself, and the solution to the mystery of

The Reverend's Review

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com; @revpeterlaws)

THE WITCH

Dir Robert Eggers, US/UK 2015
Universal, £12.99 (Blu-ray), £10.99 (DVD)

I played John Proctor once, in a school production of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. It was cancelled at the last minute when most of the supporting cast didn't know their lines. To be fair, that was wise. Hearing kids with thick Geordie accents deliver lines like "Tituba danced with the devil. She wrote in his book!" warped the play too far into comedy anyway. Yet now, over 20 years later, the ghost of *The Crucible* walks again. Only this time the accents are pitch-perfect, the 17th century setting convincing, and there is very, very little to laugh about.

The film opens in a rural courtroom where a devoutly religious father won't accept the Christian credentials of the community leaders. Refusing to relent, he's cast out, along with his wife and five kids, but he's hopeful they can build a new life on their own. It's a reminder of how humble the American Dream used to be: build a house, get some livestock, honour God. Time and again, though, God refuses to honour back. The crops don't grow, the wife pleads to return to the village and, worst of all, their baby son vanishes. Was it a wolf or God's strange providence? Or might there be a witch in the wood?

The critics who praised the film on its theatrical release weren't wrong: this is an unsettling film, with images I've now filed away for future nightmares (that bit with the raven… crikey). But it's the constant throb of dread, danger and melancholy that casts the strongest spell. Some reviewers said it feels like a movie "you shouldn't be watching", a view stoked by the religious and political protest group The Temple of Satan, who publically endorsed it. "*The Witch*," they argued, "is more than a film, it's a transformative Satanic experience". Of course, the ToS don't actually believe Satan is a literal, supernatural entity: he's a literary, symbolic figurehead. But the average moviegoer doesn't know that. So the film feels 'risky' from the off; "there be devil-power in that there Blu-ray".

Perhaps that's why so many audiences were ticked off when they finally saw it, declaring it boring, too arty and just not scary. I find it impossible to agree with these viewers: for most of the movie my heart rate was at vigorous exercise level.

As a church minister, I can imagine some fellow Christians saying this movie is blasphemous. But perhaps they should skip this week's sermon and watch this instead. It's a sucker-punch reminder of how a graceless, sin-obsessed interpretation of Christianity leads to disillusioned believers seeking a spiritual outlet elsewhere (it's no accident that the only real laughter and delight found in the film has a Satanic source). Jesus said he came to give "life in all its fullness, while the thief [the Devil] came to steal, kill and destroy". Yet *The Witch* brilliantly shows how 'life' can make us feel that the exact opposite is true: that it's God who belittles us and takes our humanity away, as if he's on a constant quest to keep us down. While the Devil seems to be the only fella who wants to lift us high. I guess it's the same "God's a party-pooper" message the serpent gave to Adam and Eve. *The Witch* is a chilling reminder of what a beguiling argument it can be.

Fortean Times Verdict
SKIP THIS WEEK'S SERMON AND WATCH *THE WITCH* INSTEAD… **8**

what happened to Louis fails to carry the weight or provoke the shock it should – not least because you'll see it coming from a mile away. These tonal issues are undoubtedly linked to clumsy attempts to give the piece a timeless feel, which instead create only jarring shifts in tone.

What we are left with is not a good film with a few flaws, but rather a mediocre one with some good elements; once the credits roll, you're left with the distinct feeling that this is another case of the book being better than the film.

Leyla Mika Sol Mikkelsen

Fortean Times Verdict
DISAPPOINTING ADAPTATION OF BESTSELLING NOVEL **5**

Asterix: Mansions of the Gods

Dir Louis Clichy, Alexandre Astier

On UK release from 19 August

If you've ever read and enjoyed Goscinny and Uderzo's books about Asterix the Gaul, you'll know that a film like this is a lot like visiting old friends. Standards must be observed and expectations met: Obelix should never be allowed to drink Getafix's potion, the fish sold by Unhygenix must always be off, and when Romans are launched skyward all that should be left are their sandals floating in the air. *Mansions of the Gods* delivers what you'd expect, with a plot revolving around Cæsar's plan to build luxury Roman apartments next to the Gauls' village, thus ensuring that they will, without their knowledge, be absorbed into Roman culture. But things never go according to plan, do they?

For a family summer movie, the 3D animation on offer isn't mind-blowing, but then again the source material perhaps never really demands that it should be. Obviously, the younger you are, the more you'll enjoy the film, but adults will find plenty to smile at, which was always one of the series' attractions.

Originally released in French in 2014, this Anglicised version is jam-packed with English comedy stars: Jack Whitehall voices Asterix, Nick Frost is Obelix, and Jim Broadbent delivers an excellent Cæsar, although for me it's Greg Davis, as the put-upon Centurion in charge, who steals the show. If you're a big Asterix fan or are going with the kids, then you'll probably enjoy it; others can probably pass.

Mark McConnell

Fortean Times Verdict
FANS OF THE GAUL, YOUNG OR OLD, WILL LOVE THIS **5**

Tank 432

Dir Nick Gillespie, UK 2016

Kaleidoscope Home Entertainment, £12.99 (DVD)

A hapless team of mercenaries, with two orange-jumpsuited and hooded hostages in tow, blunders through the countryside looking for somewhere to hole up. Caught in the middle of what appears to be a nation-wide conflict with murderous supernatural beings, the mercs are beginning to lose it amid the fear and confusion until they spot an abandoned Bulldog tank. Shutting themselves in, and the enemies out, their relief is palpable… until they realise the door is jammed and they are stuck.

There have been numerous recent movies with this set-up, the protagonists stuck somewhere horrible and faced with few options. The highest profile example was Danny Boyle's *127 Hours*, but there have been many others, dumping their characters in ski lifts, saunas and, at the bottom of the scale, an ATM vestibule. *Tank 432* is superior to these because it has interesting characters as well as an intriguing backstory.

Ben Wheatley's name is all over the publicity, but he's here only as executive producer, and you can make up your own mind as to what that may or may not have entailed. I feel some sympathy for writer-director Nick Gillespie, because he has turned out a fine low-budget regardless of any input from his more illustrious buddy. And buddies they must be, for Gillespie has worked on most of Wheatley's features to date and the latter's influence is undeniable: one might facetiously call this film *A Tank in a Field in England*, building as it does a disorienting, hallucinatory atmosphere with an omnipresent threat of violence. Gillespie draws fine performances from his cast, sustains the tension and eschews modern horror clichés.

Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict
INTENSE AND NIGHTMARISH COMBAT HORROR **8**

TELEVISION

STRANGER THINGS

Created by the Duffer Brothers. All episodes available on Netflix

If you're nostalgic for those far-off, halcyon days when you and your pals would ride your bikes through the woods or play Dungeons and Dragons for 10 hours at a stretch before devouring the latest Stephen King novel or watching a copy of *Poltergeist* rented from the video store, then you'll find this latest original series from Netflix particularly resonant, and likely as comforting as it is scary.

The setting is, of course, small-town America, and the story is about what happens to a quartet of school friends when one of their number disappears without explanation and the life of the tight-knit community is changed forever. What unfolds over the eight episodes of the series follows numerous twists and turns, and takes in monsters in the woods, sinister government agencies, experiments with telekinesis, and dark parallel dimensions; that *Stranger Things* serves up so much weirdness whilst remaining grounded in the experiences of its broad cast of characters, both child and adult, speaks volumes for the show's tight construction and excellent script. There are visual nods to everything from *Alien*, *Close Encounters* and *The Thing* to *E.T.* and *The Goonies*, and the universe the series inhabits – indeed, reconstructs out of pop-cultural touchstones – is a Spielbergian memory of how things used to be not so long ago but seemingly a universe away.

What's remarkable, though, is that for all its references to an earlier, more innocent pop culture universe, the series never goes for the easy option of lapsing into knowingness; instead, it plays things completely straight – as straight as its characters, who inhabit their world-turned-upside-down with complete naturalness – with none of the winking self-referentiality that your average Hollywood movie exploring similar terrain would feel obliged to indulge in. In the end, what makes this so very good is not so much the brilliant set-dressing, pitch-perfect synth score (which sounds like a bit of previously lost vintage John Carpenter), or groovy title sequence design, all of which evoke the era so well, but the Duffer Brothers' ability to go beyond the stylistic tics and trademarks of the 1980s to recapture something of the emotional landscape of the time. It's quite an achievement, and results in a remarkably enjoyable bit of television.

The cast is uniformly excellent, the younger members punching way above their weight, but special plaudits go to Winona Ryder as the anguished mother of the missing Will and Millie Bobby Brown as the mysterious young girl at the centre of all this high strangeness. **David Sutton** 9/10

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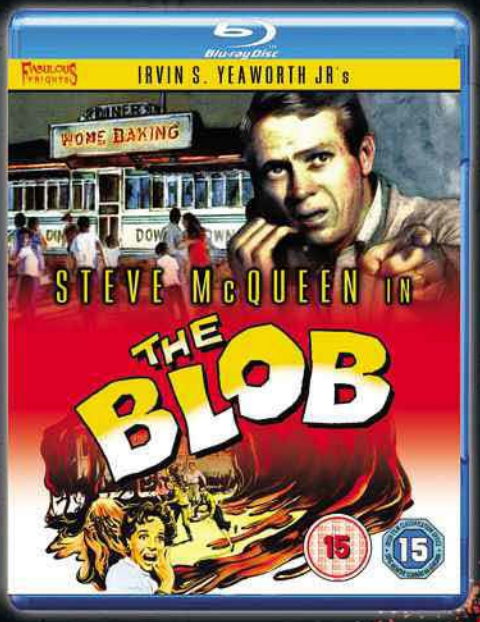

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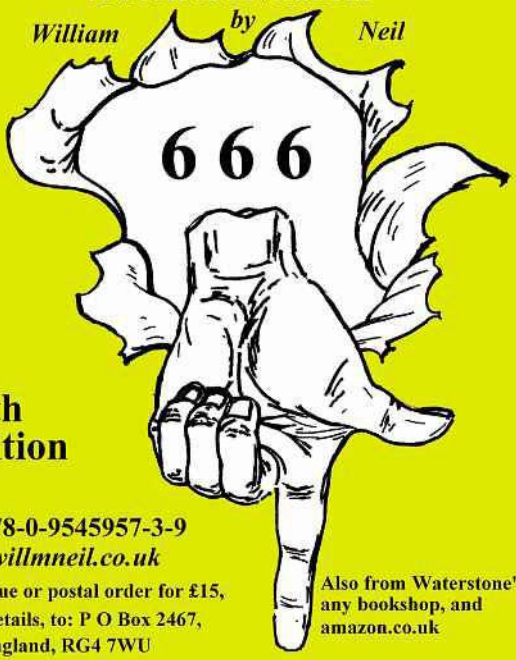

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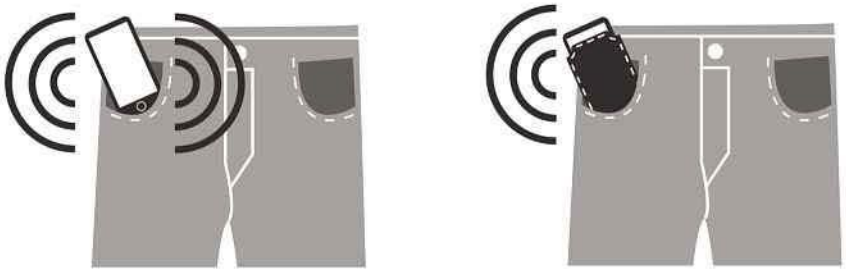

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Dear FT...

letters

Headless cat

In 1994 while on my way to college I encountered a headless cat around the corner from where I lived in Brixton, south London. It occurred to me at the time that it had been decapitated with a blade as opposed to a traffic accident and its body deliberately left very conspicuously on the pavement of a residential road. Before my brain registered what it was I could see a white body with just a red stump and what I took to be the poor thing's windpipe. The cut was very clean and no blood or anything else was on the pavement, suggesting it had been killed elsewhere. Brixton is very close to the areas where cat killings are occurring [**FT341:4**], and it strikes me as unusual that cats are still turning up in the same condition more than 20 years after I saw this unfortunate one. Could one individual be responsible, or is it coincidental and indeed more common that we might think?

About a week later a young couple knocked on my door. They had been looking after a friend's cat, which had bolted a few days earlier. Their cat was white, and I thought it best to tell them I'd seen a dead white cat. The only deviation from the whiteness was a patch on the head, which they asked me about. I almost said, "It didn't have a head" before saying I didn't see. The couple lived close by and the thought that someone had picked the cat up from this area, killed it and returned its body to the same place has bothered me ever since.

N O'Donnell
North Shields, Tyne and Wear

Actresses from beyond

Regarding Lynda Bellingham's amorous revenante [**FT342:22**]: it surprises me, given our eudoxolatrous (celeb-worshipping) culture, that more actresses don't follow suit. In the 1980s, Klaus Schreiber claimed to have obtained an image of Romy Schneider (David Fontana, *Is There An Afterlife?* 2005, p.378). To my eye, it doesn't look like her, barring post mortem plastic surgery, which would violate Occam's Razor. Subsequently, EVP researcher Gerry Connelly attempted to contact Lili Damita; her 'response' was so faint he dismissed it as a figment of his own subconscious. He does, however, encourage similar experiments (*EVP: The Cinderella Science*, 2001, p.113ff.)

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

Simulacra corner

David Drexler photographed this striking redwood burl in the Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park in Northern California in April 2016. *We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com – and please tell us your postal address.*

Deaths exaggerated

In all the tributes to folk fiddling legend Dave Swarbrick, who died on 3 June 2016, I was surprised to notice that people didn't pick up on the oddity that his best known work was "Babbacombe Lee" (1971) – about a man who should have died by hanging but survived the gallows – and Swarbrick's own misreported death in 1999. Two deaths that didn't happen when they 'should' have...

Graeme Kenna
By email

Ethnic MIBs?

I was interested to see Albert K Bender's witness drawings of his 'Men In Black' [**FT341:24**]. He seems to be depicting them as being black as well as dressing in black; i.e. Afro-Caribbean. I don't think I have ever seen this made explicit before. Black MIBs would not, surely, conform to the subsequent development of the trope, which depicts them as smartly dressed WASP CIA agents?

Roger J Morgan
London

Editor's note: Some MIBs, described in such works as John Keel's Operation Trojan Horse *(1970), were perceived as vaguely oriental or olive-skinned.*

Medium replies

I would like to draw your attention to one of the real jewels of fortean publishing, Concetta Bertoldi's *Do Dead People Watch You Shower? And Other Questions You've Been Dying To Ask A Medium* (HarperCollins, 2008, ISBN 978-0-06-135122-8). The title says it all – I can't claim to have read much of it, but it is at once uproariously funny and really serious from a fortean viewpoint. After all, if you *do* believe in personal survival, you must accept that the departed spirits can spy on you in the most intimate situations. The book is organised as a series of questions to Ms Bertoldi, a celebrated medium who "consults regularly with members of Britain's royal family".

Some examples (the answers are abbreviated):

Do dead people watch us shower? ('Sure!')

Does Grandma know I like to do THAT in bed? ("Certainly – but who cares? [She's] dead!").

Is it possible to ask the dead for a moment of privacy? ("I hate to break it to you, but no.")

Do the dead have sex on the Other Side? ("Boy, you've got a one-track mind! No.")

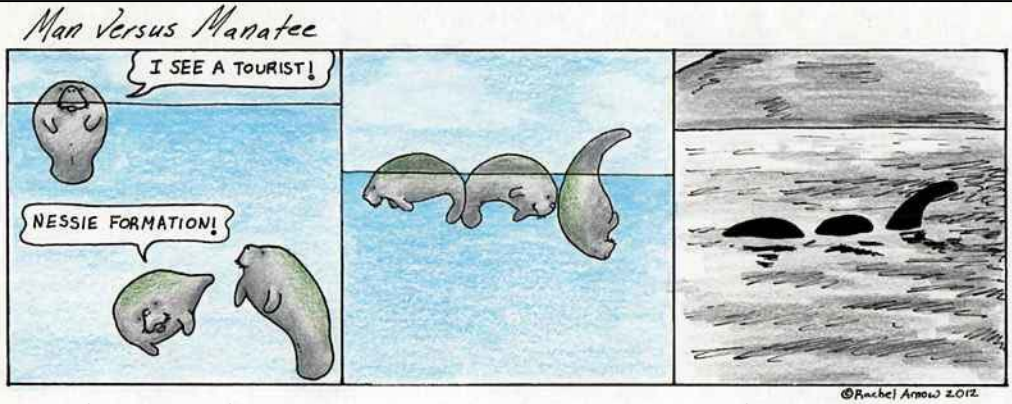
Is there such a thing as a 'dirty old ghost'? ("I've twice had a spirit try to make love to me.")

Do the dead ever try to give you fashion advice? ("No.")

There's a lot more – 278 pages in all – but you get the drift. An ideal gift for the spiritualist in your life.

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

letters



ABOVE: A further example of marine mammals impersonating a multi-humped lake monster from Rachel Arnow's 'Man versus Manatee' series. You can find more at http://mvsm.omnomzom.com.

Nessie candidates

Roland Watson's article, 'Some Fin of Interest? – The FC Adams Nessie Photo' [**FT341:28-33**] gives credibility to the theory that the 1934 photo showed the fin of a dolphin, most likely a Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*), which are regular visitors to Scottish waters. (The name was incorrectly spelled 'Rossi's' in the article). Ivan T Sanderson always believed it was the photo of the dorsal fin of a killer whale (*Orcinus orca*), once known as the Grampus. Dolphins and porpoises are known to enter bays, harbours and lochs. More recently, a bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) swam 150 miles (240km) up the St John's River to Lake Monroe in Sanford, Florida, before it was netted by SeaWorld and returned to brinier environs.

The late Bill Ervin, Curator of Fishes for SeaWorld, theorised that Nessie sightings were misidentifications of basking sharks (*Cetorhinus maximus*), so-named for their habit of rising to the surface to bask in the sun. There was once a fishery for basking sharks at Moray Firth where they were taken for their oil and livers, which yield high concentrations of vitamins.

The basking shark is the world's second largest fish and can attain a length of 40ft (12m); therefore the dorsal fin and upper lobe of its tail fin protruding above the surface could give a good Nessie impersonation when viewed from across the surface of the loch.

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

Perplexing symbols

'The Da Pinchi Code' [**FT341:8**] reminded me of Arthur Machen's *The Shining Pyramid* (1895), in which a pair of male friends, Vaugh and Dyson, investigate a series of perplexing symbols that continue to manifest on the ground and on a low wall outside Vaugh's isolated country home. The symbols left on the ground – a bowl, then a pyramid, then a half moon – are composed of rare arrowheads, while a series of primitive eyes of an "almond shape" are drawn onto the wall, another eye appearing each day.

Studying the symbols and the manner in which they mysteriously appear, and discounting that they were created by children, Dyson calmly concludes that a race of "prehistoric Turanian inhabitants" are living in caves in the surrounding wilderness, roam freely about the area at night, and communicate with one another through the various designs they leave behind. He also deduces that these beings, whom the local people identify as "the little people", have kidnapped a missing local woman and will be sacrificing her in a distant quarry, or 'bowl', shortly. Dyson's careful speculations turn out to be correct, and the pair witness the woman being slaughtered by a writhing mass of hideous beings. Machen used a similar premise in several other stories about the actual nature of fairies, such as *The Novel of the Black Seal* (1895) and *Out of the Earth* (1923).

I've also noticed that New York City utility companies routinely, and increasingly, mar the sidewalks around the city with symbols similar to those presented in the article, often in shocking pink, green and yellow neon spray paint that doesn't fade for months. A film crew recently came to shoot a movie outside the prestigious building in which I work on Manhattan's Riverside Drive, and were upset, to say the least, to find that the sidewalks had been conspicuously marred in this manner.

Joseph Barnes
New York

Ghostly observations

I do enjoy a ghostly *Fortean Times*: **FT342** is right up my alley. I have a couple of observations to make. Firstly, Robert Holliday in "The Spectre of the Ferry Boat Inn" (pp.48-51) is quite right to point out that the names Juliet Tewsley and Thomas Soul aren't right for 1050, as "surnames were not commonly used in England until the 13th century." But there's another issue to address: dates. Talking about ghosts returning on an anniversary is a common theme in ghostlore, but it doesn't make much sense if you take 18th century calendar reform into account. When England and Wales moved from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, 11 days were dropped from 1752. The nation went to sleep on Wednesday 2 September 1752 and woke up on Thursday 14 September. This obviously has an impact on any ghosts choosing to make anniversary appearances, if they hopped off this mortal coil in England and Wales before 14 September 1752, or in Scotland before 1600. For (the entirely fabricated) Juliet Tewsley to be appearing on 17 March, and for her to have died on 17 March 1050, she must have been cognisant of mid-18th century calendar reform from beyond the grave. Or her death happened 11 days before 17th. Or ghosts marking their anniversaries are just in the minds of the living, who ignore or are unaware of calendar reform.

• Regarding the name 'Anne Hinchfield' in Alan Murdie's article "Ghost Hunt at the 'House of Suicides'" (pp.30-35) – there is no record of her death being recorded in England and Wales in 1887 – or at any other time, for that matter. Hinchfield appears to be an extremely rare surname – the genealogy website Findmypast records very few instances of it. The story is that Anne committed suicide in 1887 – in fact, Robert Henry Wallace Dunlop, who had bought the land to build the house on, died in 1887. You can see Lucy Wallace Dunlop living at Ellerslie Tower on the 1891 census, a widow with three daughters and two female servants. Then in 1901 a William Vincent is living there with his Australian wife, their children, a visitor, and four servants. The house wasn't recorded on the 1911 census – "Mrs Wallace Dunlop" appears on the schedule, but a note in the margin (I do so love marginalia) reads "Suffragette. Would not complete form. Registrar notified." She may have temporarily let the house to the Vincents and then moved back in again. It looks to me as if Lucy Wallace Dunlop died in Ealing in 1914, aged 77.

Appearances of "Ellerslie Tower" in the British Newspaper Archive yield several adverts placed by Mrs Dunlop in her search for domestic staff, but there's also a short story published in the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent* on 20 March 1885 that uses it as a name for a house. The characters move about from drawing room to ballroom, usually with "a firm

step". And there is melodrama: "Leonard's mother died when he was an infant. She died raving mad, after trying to kill her child; and Leonard had on one occasion shown symptoms of inheriting the taint of insanity." But what chance is there of a melodramatic short story in a Yorkshire newspaper making itself known to people in Ealing?

It is very strange that the alleged 20 or so suicides at the house don't appear in newspapers as inquest reports – not even one. I searched the online archive using the house name and the two different road names; however, perhaps a different approach to searching might bring them up. Whilst there could be cover-ups, surely that's a highly unlikely number over a long period of time. And if there were cover-ups, why did the police tell Green about them when he inquired? Wouldn't this information be embargoed? Was it just local gossip that they imparted?

There is, however, a report in the *Daily Independent* of 21 September 1934, of a young surgeon who was killed, and a nurse who was injured, after falling from a fire escape at St Mary's Hospital in Paddington. The surgeon, Dr Roger S Richmond, lived on Mount Park Road in Ealing. This road leads south from Montpelier Road (the old name for Montpelier Road was, according to the 1891 census, Mount Park Hill). Could this account in some way for Andrew Green's mother, in 1944, 'remembering' the nursemaid throwing the child and herself from the top of Ellerslie Tower, which she said took place in 1934?

Helen Barrell
By email

Hummers

Paul Giamatti asked for help regarding a 17th century ritual of disguised men going from house to house sweeping and making a buzzing sound [**FT339:73**]. In the North of England, particularly along the Yorkshire-Lancashire border, a similar custom existed until the mid 20th century. In the early part of the 20th century many houses still had cast iron 'ranges' which consisted of a fire grate with an oven to one side and often a water boiler to the other. These ranges were polished with a substance called 'black lead' and were the pride of every housewife. Around New Year, children would visit the houses with brushes, dustpans and 'black lead' and on being admitted to the house would proceed to sweep the hearth and polish the range while humming all the time, and with the expectation of receiving a small reward. They were known as mummers although no mumming play was enacted as part of the ceremony.

I recall seeing the remnant of this custom one evening in the Black Swan public house in Todmorden around the year 1965. Two children entered the pub with dustpan and brush, humming all the time until they received a reward and before being shown the door.

By the 1960s most houses had replaced the old cast iron range with modern tiled fireplaces and although it is likely to be an urban legend, it was said that on some occasions the children applied the black lead to the newly installed fireplace. It must be presumed that what they received for their efforts was not what they expected. [See also **FT341:71**]

Garry Stringfellow
Sowerby Bridge, West Yorkshire

Early Americans

Regarding *Argonauts of the Stone Age* by Andrezej Pydyn [reviewed **FT342:61**]: there is now no reason to insist that *Homo erectus* could not have inhabited North America. It can't be dismissed as impossible. There are reasons why evidence would not be recognised or found. Old Stone Age tools can look like randomly chipped rock: no axes blades or points. We have a productive Texas excavation, Gault, which is winding up, having reached bedrock and produced a trove of Clovis and some pre-Clovis material. It's located at the junction of three bioregions, then and now, and a great place for a camp. That's why it was chosen for excavation. We can look at landscape and see where would be a good place for habitation, but we also know when it was and when it wasn't. No point in looking at a lakeshore of a lake that dried up 50,000 or 100,000 years ago. Leave that to the palæontologists (if they are interested) – and in the US they won't be looking for human tools or remains. So the right sites won't be investigated.

Hugh Henry
By email

Conspiracy term

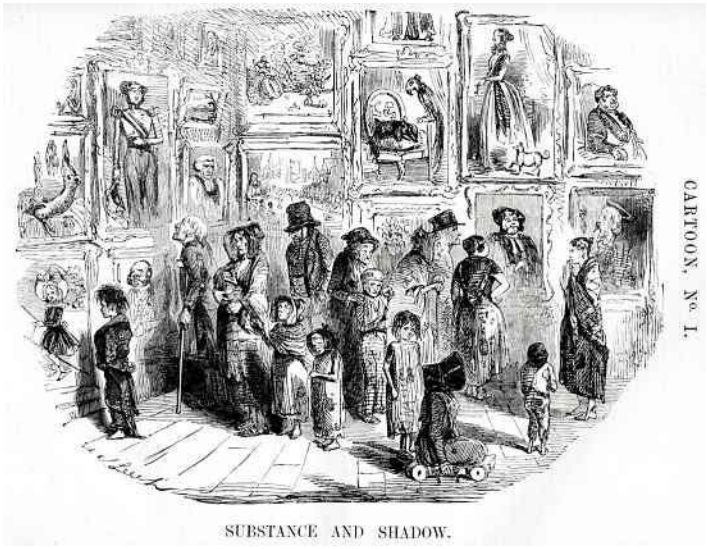
Following Conspirasphere's invitation to find or coin "a good word in English" for conspiracy theory [**FT342:5**], I propose *cryptocollusionism*, the study of which would be *cryptocollusionology*. Should be worth quite a few Scrabble points!

Dr Thea Tomaini
Associate Professor of English (Teaching), University of Southern California

Avebury's 'red man'

I took this photograph in the Avebury stone circle in 1982. A small and very odd humanoid shape in red can be seen on the grass between the stones. I took the photo using photographic film with a standard SLR camera. I neither saw nor in any other way sensed anything unusual at the time. I am prepared to concede that it is a blemish in the development process – but if so, it is oddly humanoid in shape.

Dr Peter WH Smith
Watton At Stone, Hertfordshire



Cartoon as satire

Barry Baldwin [Classical Corner 199, **FT341:17**] points out that the word cartoon (originally meaning a preparatory drawing for a painting, deriving from the Italian *cartone*, heavyweight paper suitable for transferring design to wall) attained its modern sense only in 1863. This is surely 20 years too late (and may have been a typo). The notion of a cartoon being a humorous, often specifically satirical, drawing designed for mass reproduction in its own right, rather than intended merely as a stage in the planning of a painting, comes about as a result of the (accidental) burning down of the old Palace of Westminster in 1834 (see excellent, enthusiastic paintings of this event by Turner.) New Houses of Parliament were needed immediately, and an architectural competition was held to determine the best design. Charles Barry's design won, with Gothic interiors largely orchestrated by Pugin, and building began in 1840. By 1843 the matter of suitably lofty wall decoration had been mooted, and another competition was held, with artists invited specifically to submit "cartoons" – large drawings of themes from British history and literature. The idea was that the winners would translate their cartoon designs into fresco paintings inside the building – a daft notion as Britain had long lost any living tradition of fresco painting, and our climate doesn't really favour the technique.

The matter of these paintings would drag on for years, but meanwhile the magazine *Punch* decided to poke fun at these great, inspirational cartoons (most of them deadly dull, to judge from surviving documentation) which had gone on public display in a special exhibition. In 1843, therefore, they published (amongst other digs at the whole project) a devastatingly satirical illustration by John Leech entitled "Cartoon, No. 1 – Substance and Shadow" (above). Pointing out the gulf between artistic aspirations and the realities of life, it shows a typical Royal Academy exhibition (not the exhibition of the Houses of Parliament cartoons, though the title obviously refers to that). The paintings on the walls depict affluence and plenty, rich sitters and still-lives, but the viewers are a bewildered crowd of the very poor, including cripples, beggars and a prostitute, whose own lives clearly offer no connection to the self-satisfied world of art. Timely satirical imagery of this kind goes back a very long way (c.f. Classical Corner) but this is the first instance I've found of such an illustration being connected to the word "cartoon". True, it's not exactly a laugh-out-loud piece of whimsical design, but cultural circumstances had conspired to call Leech's searing pictorial comment a "cartoon" and the term stuck.

Gail-Nina Anderson
Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Bait animals

David Bowles suggests that he has pinpointed the source of a modern urban legend regarding the case of the alleged sale of kittens online for use as bait in dog-fighting [**FT340:67**]. Whilst his efforts, and those of the RSPCA, in investigating and debunking this case are to be applauded, I would suggest that this is simply one variation on the theme of 'Dog-Fighting Bait Animals' tales; this particular strand falling into the 'Free to Good Home' category that has circulated online for at least the last 20 years.

In summary, it is frequently reported that sites such as Craigslist are being monitored by dog fighters in order to acquire cats and dogs as free bait for their deplorable activities. In some cases, pets are reportedly stolen off the street, giving us yet another common variation that crops up from time to time ("Stolen pets used for dog fighting/fur trade/illegal meat/animal sacrifice", etc). Specific cases in the US and UK are sometimes cited, but often turn out to be untrue or exaggerated. For example, in April this year it was reported in *Metro* (daily UK newspaper) that two kittens that were found covered in permanent coloured marker ink were the intended victims of dog-fighting teams. The different colours of the ink, it was claimed, would have allowed spectators to bet on which animal would be killed first. Although the act of permanently dyeing an animal's fur is clearly an act of cruelty, the assertion that they were coloured for fighting and betting purposes was later discovered to be pure invention on the part of an excitable local newspaper reporter.

In one typical article online ("The Gruesome Facts About 'Free to Good Homes' Animal Ads" by Patricia Kelly, 15 June 2000) the writer's agenda appears to have been to persuade her readers to neuter their pets rather than provide any evidence for such claims. In addition to the dangers of animals being used as dog-fighting bait, she also stated as 'fact' that black kittens are particularly prone to being acquired and sacrificed by satanic cults around Hallowe'en.

However, despite the topic having all the hallmarks of a modern urban legend, the League Against Cruel Sports very recently tackled the subject in an online article entitled "Dog Fighting 'Bait Animals' – Real or Urban Myth", and concluded that, although many of the scare stories around animals being acquired for fighting-bait were unfounded, the use of pet animals in the shady world of dog-fighting probably does occur despite little or no hard evidence.

I would certainly agree with Mr Bowles's suggestion that these rumours will persist long into the future, reinforced by – but probably not as a direct result of – the case investigated by his team.

Alistair Moffatt
Totnes, Devon

Ancient wisdom?

I am always surprised by the number of individuals and books that espouse the notion that 'ancient' civilisations were more advanced than our own when it comes to their spiritual insights, technological understanding and scientific attainments; remember the fracas about the Mayan calendar in 2012. Despite their engineering feats, apparent knowledge of the heavens and astronomical alignments of their buildings, the Mesoamerican civilisations such as the Aztecs and Maya indulged in widespread human sacrifice and the bloody excision of human hearts in order to shore up the Universe and prevent it collapsing into chaos – hardly the work of an enlightened, scientifically advanced civilisation! So, too, prehistoric Europe indulged in ritual human sacrifice (e.g. the Bog Bodies) to placate their gods; and in the ancient Near East, rulers were frequently accompanied in death by the mass slaughter and burial of their living relatives. Hence, the so-called wisdom and advanced spirituality of 'ancient' civilisations is misplaced, as is the notion that ancient civilisations were too dumb to build the pyramids or megalithic structures or other ancient structures without the help of alien astronauts.

David Keyworth
Maryborough, Australia

it happened to me...

Have you had strange experiences that you cannot explain? We are always interested in reading of odd events and occurrences. CONTACT US BY POST: **FORTEAN TIMES, BOX 2409, LONDON, NW5 4NP** OR E-MAIL TO **sieveking@forteantimes.com** Or post your message on the **http://forum.forteantimes.com**.

First-hand accounts from *Fortean Times* readers and posters at forum.forteantimes.com

Rain man

In 2006, when I was 11, my mother and I were leaving Henry and Rose's, a takeaway in the Irish seaside town of Bray, when I noted something in the rain, in the middle of the road: a humanoid figure, transparent but visible, a distortion like the Predator, its torso and clear bald head made out of rain sticking through the tarmacked road. I glimpsed this figure, wandering around in a daze, turning its head for a brief moment to be destroyed eventually by oncoming cars. I could see the panic and the strangeness. I felt very odd after this, as if I had been bathed in his watery remains. Was this a ghostly echo?

George White
Bray, Co Wicklow

Verge glider

When I met an old friend recently, we got to talking about a spooky experience we shared on the old A361 (now the North Devon Link Road) in August/September 1976. We were in a line of cars that had all slowed down, the reason being a figure, which at first appeared to be swathed in bandages, gliding along the grass verge and passing us on the passenger side. As it passed our car, I remember turning away to avoid eye contact, although it had no discernable features. Close up, it appeared as a thick opaque mist in human form. As it passed the cars in front, they all started to move on, so a number of people must have witnessed it.

Has anyone else had a paranormal experience on this road?

R Marsden
Dunchurch, Warwickshire

Guess who's calling

Many years ago, I noticed that I could often guess who was on the phone before I answered it – so I tried to fine-tune this sense and focus on who it might be. Now, when my phone rings or I get a text, nine times out of 10 I will guess correctly who it is. This 'sixth sense' is now so honed that I often find myself thinking of someone just before they phone. I wonder if everyone has this 'brain muscle', even if only a few realise it?

Caraline Brown
By email

Lively TV

In 2003 I was living in a rented house with my cousin in south London. I woke up in the dark one night to the sound of the television playing extremely loudly downstairs. Half asleep, I stumbled downstairs into the front room. Assuming that my cousin had fallen asleep on the sofa, I started to say, "Mate, can you turn that down?" Then I saw by the flickering light of the TV that the sofa was unoccupied, and all the lights downstairs were switched off. I had felt sure that someone was in the room. A bit unnerved, I switched a light on and had a look around. The doors and windows were all locked, and there was no one around. I turned the TV off and made my way back upstairs. Feeling somewhat unreasonably spooked, I read a book and eventually went back to sleep. I asked my cousin about it the next morning. He was insistent that he hadn't left the TV on, and he hadn't heard anything either. I guess an obvious explanation would be that the cat had stood on the remote control, although neither the cat nor the remote were anywhere to be seen when I came downstairs. Also, the TV was absurdly loud – maybe the (absent) cat had turned the volume up too?

Matt Kenway
Pocklington, East Riding of Yorkshire

Armour illuminated

In March 2016 my parents and I visited the museum at the Toyokuni Shrine in Japan. I saw a light flickering above a suit of Samurai armour in the corner of a room. I ignored it, but as I was walking around that corner the hair on my neck stood up. I asked my mum if we could skip that corner and she agreed. After we passed the corner mum said that I should bow, which I did, and the light above the armour stayed on. We stood up and it flickered again. We went through the same routine a few more times and the result was the same each time. Mum asked my dad to come over where we were standing and take a video. As soon as he held up the camera the light stayed on, but as soon as he put the camera away, it flickered. We then decided to get the hell out of there.

Griffin Garside
Hong Kong

Frightening insect

Eight years ago you published a letter from Ruth Summersides in Saskatchewan, relating to something she'd seen as a child in Northumberland around 1960 or 1961 [**FT237:77**]. This struck a chord with me immediately, as about 10 years earlier when I was six or seven, I remember being frightened by something that sounded remarkably similar. Ruth described a strange whirring thing with a ruff and tendrils that apparently flew at her, close to her house. One day, when I was living at Allestree near Derby, I came home from school to find my mother was out. This was fairly unusual. As I was deciding what to do, something flew at me, just missing my head – I can still sense the draught it made! – and attached itself to some brickwork. I can't remember whether it was in the front porch, which had a dark alcove on either side, or the coal shed, which was part of the house and had a door next to the back door. Probably the latter, as a spare key may have been kept in there. Whatever it was had black whirring strands attached to it, and made a noise not unlike one of those rotating bird-scarer rattles kids used to swing round at football matches. Whatever it was gave the impression it was trying to get into the house, or at least, under cover. It seemed distinctly malevolent. It was too big for an insect, probably about 6in [15cm] long, yet definitely wasn't a bird. At that stage in my life, I don't think I'd ever seen a bat. However, it was the weird rotating effect, as described in Ruth's letter, that I remember so well.

I suppose the nearest thing I can suggest that it looked like was a black shuttlecock, or perhaps a drawing of some kind of squid. Whatever it was, it scared the hell out of me. I don't remember ever mentioning it to anyone, and presumably someone came home before long and let me in, so eventually I must have put it out of my mind. The area I lived in then was only partly built up, progress being halted by World War II, but there were trees and shrubs down the side of the house, an area of waste ground beside them, and another waste space at the back of the house, where there was a very large and ancient oak tree, which could have housed all kinds of birds and insects. But what could it have been? Surely not some kind of toy, as toys around that time were fairly scarce, and no other children were around. It certainly gave the impression of being alive. Ruth's letter refers to a "flying arrow". Has anyone else ever experienced anything similar?

I collect cheap jewellery and vanity items made of early plastics, and recently acquired a Spanish-style comb at a flea market. Since it simply didn't work in my kind of hair, I attached it to a wall with a pin, and the moment I looked at it with the white wall behind it, it immediately reminded me of the thing that had seemingly flown at me all those years ago (see photo above). Did two children at different times really imagine something so similar and quite this peculiar, or were the "flying arrows" real?

Brenda Ray
Derby

FORTEAN TRAVELLER

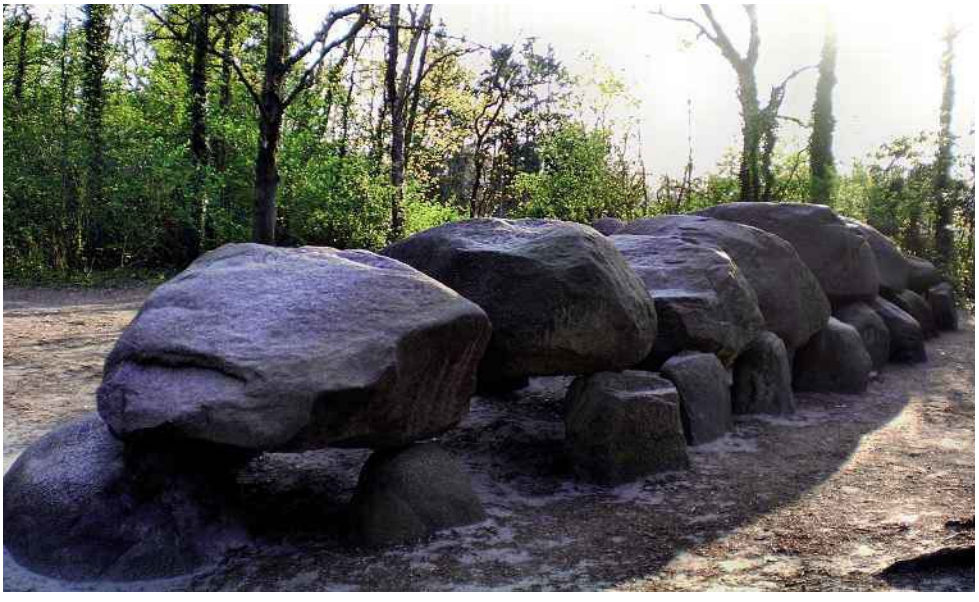
107. The Hunebedden of Holland

PJ MORRISON likes to ride his bicycle, so he set off on a two-wheeled tour of the most intriguing megalithic sites in the Netherlands – the *hunebedden*, or 'giants' beds, of the Drenthe region. Photos by the author.

When most people think of visiting the Netherlands for a holiday, a few things probably come to mind: clogs, tulips, windmills, 'Nederwiet' and partying, perhaps. Ancient Dutch megaliths might not be at the top of many people's lists. I like to cycle, though, and I like to have a reason for my cycling: drinking beer and visiting sites of historical or archæological interest are good ones.

The Dutch landscape might appear to be largely modern and artificial. Large parts of the western Netherlands were originally open water, bog and moorland that have been drained and reclaimed in an ongoing process since the early Middle Ages. It is very much a man-made landscape. In the north east, however, there is a long ridge, now called the Hondsrug (literally the 'dog's back'), composed largely of what was once glacial moraine, scoured from as far away as Finland and as far back as 150,000 years ago, at the end of the Ice Age before last. Along with sand and gravel, huge boulders, some weighing many metric tonnes, were dragged at the base of massive, kilometres-high ice sheets and glaciers, all the way to the Netherlands. These huge boulders, of an enormous variety of igneous, metamorphic and sedimentary rock, were later used by early Neolithic farmers to build large chambered tombs, called locally, *hunebedden*, or 'giants' beds'.

There is evidence that there were once more than 80 *hunebedden*. Some have long since been destroyed. Luckily, the remains of more than 50 can still be visited. They are all helpfully provided with 'D' numbers ('D' for Drenthe; the *hunebed* in Groningen is 'G1') and information boards in Dutch and English. The northeast, particularly the provinces of Groningen and Drenthe, is one of the more unspoiled regions of the Netherlands, with woodlands filled with a variety of wild birds and animals.



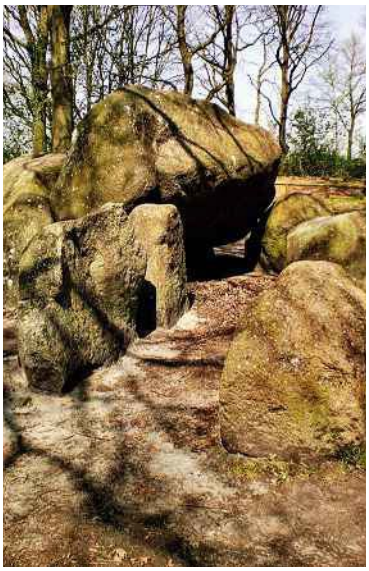
BELOW: At 22.5m (74ft) long, D21, near Borger, is the biggest *hunebed* in the Netherlands.

Spurred on by the entries and photographs in Julian Cope's excellent guide and gazetteer *The Megalithic European*, I decided to visit some of these *hunebedden*, heading to where the highest concentration of dolmens is to be found, to the east and south of Assen. I packed my gear and tent on the back of my bike and caught the train to Assen. From the train station, I cycled about 25km (16 miles) southeast, to a small nature campsite, run by the *staatsbosbeheer* (the Dutch version of the Forestry Commission). It is set in the middle of some woodland, off a short track and about 5km (3 miles) from the village of Borger, home to the biggest *hunebed* in the Netherlands and to the Borger Hunebedden Centrum, a museum and exhibition space dedicated to the megaliths.

Virtually all of the *hunebedden* lie within about 30km (19 miles) on either side of Borger. Within five to 10km (3-6 miles) easy cycling there are another five or six *hunebedden*, and more to be found around the nearby villages of Bronneger, Drouwen, Gasselte and Gieten. They vary somewhat in size and state of preservation, but are all worth a visit.

Looking like the skeletons of enormous beasts, these long tombs are usually oriented east-west and often have a short entrance passageway in the middle of one side, facing south. The central tomb is often surrounded by an elliptical ring of upright stones, extending just outside and to either side of the entrance. Originally, they would have been covered with earth to make an elliptical or roughly kidney-shaped mound. Unfortunately, when the authorities started preserving the tombs in the 19th century, they appear to have mistaken the mounds for natural dune-like deposits that had silted up over the centuries and removed them. Originally, the spaces between the large boulders, forming the walls of the chambers, would also have been filled with sand, smaller rocks and rubble. All are gone: only the bare yet still impressive boulders remain, and not always all of them. It was once quite common for the large stones to be reused as building material in local churches, or, later in the 17th century, for dyke building. Later still, from the early 19th century on, many were smashed up or blown apart, to be used as rubble for macadamising local roads. Not only that, but the chambers are now only about half as deep as they were originally. This is because the authorities have had to floor them with concrete blocks to protect the ancient surfaces, often paved, which may still lie below.

Considering that the tombs are



amongst the oldest in Northern Europe, having probably been built between 3,500 BC and 2,800 BC (4,800 to 5,500 years ago), they are still very impressive. The original builders, known officially as the Tricherrandbecher (TRB), or Funnel Beaker Culture, were among the earliest farmers in this part of the world. They made pottery, particularly the distinctive decorated, funnel-shaped beakers that give these ancient people their name. Not much has been found in the way of human remains in the tombs. The sandy soil and general conditions aren't very good for preserving organic materials, and many of the burials were in the form of cremations. However, enough has been found, along with a variety of pottery, flint and stone artefacts, to give a picture of the builders. There's even a suggestion at the Hunebedden Centrum in Borger, that local farming families still living in the region could be their descendants. Burials goods, offerings, a huge variety of pottery and polished flint or stone axes, have been found at some sites.

Originally, I thought the 'hun' part of the word Hunebedden was a reference to the Huns, whose empire once stretched all the way to the north eastern borders of the Netherlands. However, 'hun' is a mediæval word meaning 'giant'. It might also have derived from 'heen', the word for 'away' – i.e. 'heengaan' or 'going away'. The word for shroud – 'hennekleed' – shares the same root. So, 'hennebed' could have meant the 'away' people went to when they died. In some parishes, the influence of Christianity appears to have replaced references to *hunnen*, or giants, with the Devil. One of the earliest references to a *hunebed* was made in 1547 by Antonius Schonhovius, the Canon of Brugge: the Classical Renaissance was well under way in Europe and he believed that the *hunebedden* were actually the 'Pillars of Hercules' of the ancient Greeks.

There are two *hunebedden*, in the centre of Rolde – 'D17' and 'D18' – right

The mounds might have been sacred to the god Donar

next to each other and very close to the church. They make excellent climbing frames for kids. Several spots on these two monuments have been polished by generations of children clambering over them to expose shiny pink granite. Schonhovius was told that one of the *hunebedden* in Rolde, probably 'D17', was called the 'Duvels Kot' or 'Duvelskut' – meaning either the Devil's House (*kot*), Devil's Cunt (*kut*), or possibly the Devil's Arse (*kont*). It's possible that this is a rustic local reference in the more playful folk-devil tradition rather than the hellfire-and-damnation of official religion. However, according to at least one source, the word *Duvel*, in the Drenthe dialect, can also mean 'lightning' or 'thunder-stone'. There is evidence that stone axes were found at both these sites when they were excavated around the time of Schonhovius, and there is a classical reference, from the time of Nero, suggesting that these mounds might have been sacred to Donar, the Germanic god of fertility and lightning. There's also the possibility that Donar with his axe or hammer and Hercules with his club might have been amalgamated at some point, after the fashion of the Romans. Thursday, or Thor's day, is named *donderdag*, 'thunder-day' or 'Donar's day', in the Netherlands.

Some references to the short entranceways in the middle of the chambered tombs describe them as resembling the short handle of a hammer formed by the chambers on either side: a very short handle indeed, and it would have been quite hidden inside the now missing mound. However, I do wonder if there's a reference to the

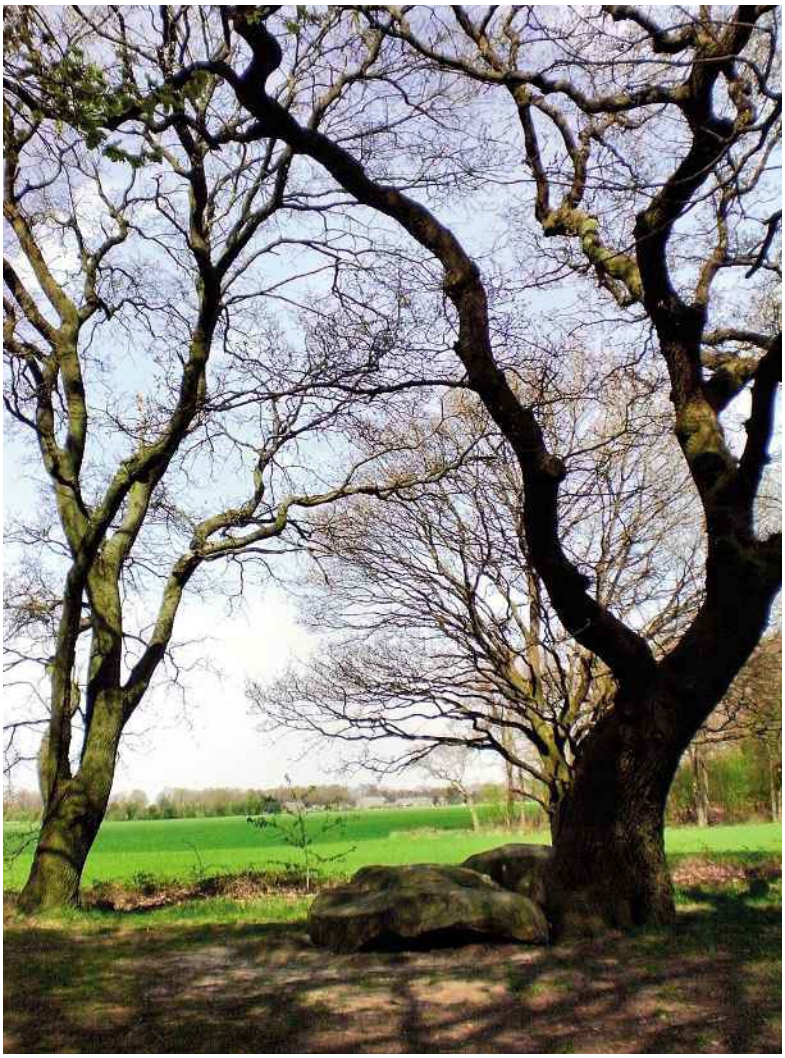
TOP LEFT: The entrance to the *hunebed* at Borger, with a glimpse of the Hunebed Centrum in the background.

ABOVE RIGHT: *Hunebed* D17 at Rolde – probably the one once known as the 'Duvelskut'.

Viking god Thor's legendary hammer Mjolnir in there somewhere. Certainly, artefacts like the polished stone axes, flint knives, and arrowheads were often called *donderstenen*, or thunder stones, and were believed to have been left behind by Donar following lightning and thunderstorms; they were credited with magical or healing properties. In Overijssel, to the south of Drenthe, farmers kept stone axes in their farmhouses to protect them from lightning strikes, and they were believed to have health-giving powers. Small pieces knapped off the axes were given to children as a cure for convulsions. Stone axes remained highly prized as grave offerings long after their use as practical tools or weapons had been superseded by copper and bronze versions. Millennia later, the Vikings were still wearing symbols of Thor's hammer, and similar axe or hammer symbols could be found throughout Northern Europe and into the far north of Scandinavia.

Flint nodules from chalk deposits were dragged along with the glaciers and occasionally can still be found lying about on the land in Groningen and Drenthe, but being so valuable many were probably traded across many hundreds of miles of land and sea: not a straightforward prospect in the Neolithic, when there were few roads through the thick forests and miles of treacherous bog. The Drenthe plateau and the Hondsrug lie at the western edge of a much busier area of megalithic culture in northern Germany and Denmark.

The local glacial deposits did not offer the quality of flint needed to make the highest quality axes and there is evidence that they came from as far away as Holstein in northeast Germany or Jutland in Denmark, some 200km (124 miles) to the east. Caches of large axes have been found buried in places that were probably once deep bog, and in streams and small rivers. Sometimes they appear to have been smeared with red ochre. There is evidence that these axes were never used, or even intended



to be used, as tools or weapons, but were created specifically as ceremonial offerings. In this they also differ from the axes found in the tombs.

Was there some sort of 'axe cult' stretching across ancient Europe and encompassing the double-headed labrys of ancient Crete (a symbol of the lightning of Zeus), the Slavic Axe of Perun, Thor's Mjolnir, and the Finnish Ukonvasara? Did these reflect an ancient belief in some ancient Ur-deity of lightning and fertility? Recently, a laser scan of Stonehenge revealed 71 engravings of Bronze Age axe-heads, bringing the total at the site to 115. It's worth pointing out that the axes all have their edge turned upward towards the sky and that they resemble in form some early depictions of Mjolnir.

Tantalising correspondences, but nothing more: thousands of miles and thousands of years lie between these various symbols and forms. But why were axes considered so significant? Perhaps it was their very utility, either as weapons of war or tools for working wood. Flint gave ancient man not only the gift of fire but the ability to shape the world around him – to fell trees, clear forest, work timber and to build homesteads, bridges, causeways and boats from logs. It offered real power over nature. I can also attest to the fact that, even to this day, there are occasionally the most tremendous thunderstorms in this part of the world. They can flood an area in a matter of hours, or even minutes; storms with the potential to wipe out almost everything that ancient man had so painstakingly won from nature.

In the Middle Ages, people believed that the *hunebedden* had been built by giants. As late as 1660, Johan Picardt, a Calvinist pastor whose interpretation of local legends was influenced by his knowledge of the Bible, wrote that the tombs had been built by child-eating giants some time after the Great Flood. Picardt also believed that the *hunebedden* were once the homes of the *Witte Wieven* or 'White Ladies', misty wraiths of ancient folklore often compared to Fates, Furies, elves, witches, or banshees. Picardt's description of *Witte Wieven* has also been compared to historical and legendary accounts of the Völva, Iron Age Scandinavian and Germanic wise women or priestesses who carried a magical iron staff and performed prophecy and healing. These Iron Age equivalents of Doris Stokes appear to have wielded sufficient authority to change the course of battles and decide bloody disputes. How far back in prehistory were they plying their ancient trade? Did they once set up camp around the ancient tombs? These wise women roamed around the ancient northern lands up until mediæval times, when they were finally stamped out on the orders of the Church. I wonder if the tales of ghostly ladies in white that turn up all around

He thought the tombs were built by child-eating giants

ABOVE: D23 at Bronneger, near Borger.

OPPOSITE: (Clockwise from top) The entrance to D15, Loon; D18, Rolde; D20, Drouwen; D22, near Bronneger.

the British Isles are distant memories of the same ancient tradition.

Most significantly, Picardt's insistence that the *hunebedden* were important ancient sites had an influence on the authorities in the region and helped to protect them, just when they were in danger of being reduced to rubble and used for building the new-fangled stone dykes and roads.

In 1685, the Dutch poet Titia Brongersma (according to some admirers, the Sappho of Friesland) was one of the first to have her attempt to excavate a tomb recorded. At 22.5m (74ft) long, D21, near Borger, is the biggest *hunebed* in the Netherlands. The artefacts and remains she and her diggers uncovered beneath the cobbled floor of the tomb included lugged pots (which disintegrated) that had been filled with fragments of human bone. She came to the conclusion that the tomb's builders were indeed ordinary humans rather than giants. Brongersma's classicism was of a somewhat pagan nature: she decided that the great pile of rocks was really a sort of ancient temple to Mother Nature, garlanded the site with a wreath of oak leaves and flowers as an offering to Nature, and composed a poem about it: 'Loflied op't hunebed'– 'Hymn of praise to the *hunebed*'.

Nowadays, a great deal more is known about these magnificent monuments, but their setting in the midst of the Dutch woods and countryside means they retain their mysterious atmosphere. It's worth viewing them early in the morning or late in the evening to avoid visitors and get the chance for uninterrupted photo opportunities or even a little quiet contemplation.

When it comes to travelling around and finding places to stay, I prefer quiet campsites situated in the natural landscape. Many are listed in the little green book from the *Stichting Natuurkampeerterreinen* (www.natuurkampeerterreinen.nl/en/). They are fairly cheap and you won't be surrounded by huge camper vans and caravans. It's best to book in high season, July to September. However, if you don't fancy life under canvas, you could also consider *Vrienden op de Fiets* (www.vriendenopdefiets.nl/en/), a network of people around the Netherlands, as well as adjacent parts of Belgium and Germany, with spare rooms for overnight stays on a B&B basis at very reasonable rates. FT

FURTHER READING

Wijnand v.d. Sanden, *Gids voor de hunebedden in Drenthe en Groningen,* W Books BV, 2012.

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Karsten Wentink, 'Neolithische bijldeposities in Noord-Nederland', *Nieuwe Drentse Volksalmanak*, 2007.

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Johan Picardt, *Korte Beschrijving van eenige Vergetene en Verborgene Antiquiteten Der Provintien en Landen gelegen tusschen de Noord-Zee, de Yssel, Emse en Lippe*, 1660.

Titia Brongersma, *De Bron-Swaan*, 1686.

Ludolf Smids, *Schatkamer der Nederlandsche oudheden*, 1711.

USEFUL WEBSITES

De Hunebedden in Drenthe en Groningen: www.hunebeddeninfo.nl/index.php/informatie-per-hunebed.

www.hunebeddeninfo.nl/

The Netherlands Hunebedcentrum: www.hunebedcentrum.eu/en/

Hunebedden Highway in Drenthe: www.hotspotholland.nl/drenthe_hunebedden_highway.html

Dolmens in the Netherlands: http://members.home.nl/jbmeijer/frntpage.htm

Witte Wieven: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witte_Wieven

Titia Brongersma: www.literatuurgeschiedenis.nl/lg/goudeneeuw/auteurs/lgge041.html

PJ MORRISON owns up to a not entirely dodgy degree in Cultural Studies and an interest in paradigm shifts in knowledge, culture and history. He's happy noodling with ideas exploring the boundaries where things change and interesting stuff happens.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX

Victoria Woodhull 1

HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

IN JUNE 2016 HILARY CLINTON BECAME THE FIRST AMERICAN WOMAN TO BE NOMINATED AS A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE...

OR WAS SHE??!

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BUT HER MOTHER WAS A MYSTIC, WHO REGULARLY HAD VISIONS OF JESUS AND SATAN...

FROM HER EARLIEST DAYS, VICTORIA SAW ANGELS...

WHEN SHE WAS OLD ENOUGH TO DO CHORES, SPIRITS WOULD HELP HER...

AND THEY WOULD LIFT HER THREE OR FOUR FEET OFF THE FLOOR WHEN SHE WALKED!

WHEN A NEIGHBOUR'S DAUGHTER DIED, VW WAS IMMEDIATELY VISITED BY THE LATE GIRL'S SOUL, AND THEY TOOK A MAGICAL TOUR OF HEAVEN FOR TWO HOURS!

THEN, LIKE HER MOTHER, SHE MET THE DEVIL! BUT SHE GLARED AT HIM FIERCELY, AND HE RAN AWAY!

AMERICA WAS IN THE GRIP OF A SPIRITUALIST FAD! WHEN HER FATHER SAW THIS, HE PUT VICTORIA AND HER YOUNGER SISTER TENNESSEE ON THE STAGE, TELLING FORTUNES AND READING MINDS...

THEY WERE A HIT!

BUT DESPITE ALL THE MONEY THEY WERE MAKING FOR HIM, THEIR FATHER BECAME MORE AND MORE DRUNKEN AND BRUTAL. HE THRASHED VICTORIA...

TO ESCAPE THIS WRETCHED LIFE, SHE MARRIED A YOUNG MAN CALLED CANNING WOODHULL! OUT OF THE FRYING PAN...

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+

LADY GHOSTBUSTERS, RETURN OF THE GRAIL, AVIAN DRONES, AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 345

ON SALE 15 SEP 2016

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Indian paranormal investigator Gaurav Tiwari, 32, was found dead at his home in Dwarka, Gujarat, in mysterious circumstances. Police called it a case of asphyxiation, but at the time of writing were yet to ascertain if it was suicide. The founder and CEO of the Indian Paranormal Society was found lying on his bathroom floor with a thin black line across his neck. According to his family, they heard a loud thud from his bathroom at around 11am on 7 July. They forced open the locked door to find Tiwari lying on the floor. He was rushed to hospital but could not be resuscitated. Initial investigation showed he had no financial or other worries that could have driven him to suicide.

Recently married, Tiwari used to stay out ghost-hunting quite late into the night and it led to some marital friction. He was investigating a suspected haunted house in Delhi's Janakpuri district on 6 July and returned home at around 1:30am, triggering a fight with his wife. He appeared absolutely fine on the day of his death, however, and was "checking mails" a few minutes before he died. His relatives – who don't believe in the paranormal – initially suspected he died from the trauma of falling on the bathroom floor. Meanwhile, Australian paranormal investigator Allen Tiller, who was working with Tiwari on a Syfy TV series *Haunting: Australia,* told his fans on Facebook that Tiwari had a heart attack. However, Tiwari's father said that a month earlier his son had told his wife he was feeling "a negative force was pulling him towards itself", and that "he was trying to control it but seemed unable to do so." His wife dismissed his fears, believing he was just depressed due to his heavy workload, and didn't tell the family about it.

An ordained minister of the Metaphysical Church of Humanistic Science, "Reverend" Gaurav Tiwari was a "certified paranormal investigator and UFO field investigator". He visited more than 6,000 haunted locations and investigated hauntings, UFO abductions and mysterious creatures. His tryst with the paranormal began in 2007 while he was studying in Florida to become a commercial pilot. He experienced phenomena like poltergeists and heard disembodied 'whispers' in the apartment he was sharing with four other people. One of his flatmates also saw an apparition of a young girl. Soon after, all the housemates reported hearing footsteps from the attic and seeing a translucent apparition of a young girl. The group vacated the house as they struggled to explain the goings-on, but the paranormal had already seized Tiwari's imagination. *India Today, 11 July 2016.*

A 65-year-old man died in a cinema auditorium while watching a screening of horror movie *The Conjuring 2*. The incident occurred at the Sri Balasubramaniar Cinema in Tiruvannamalai, a town in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The unnamed cinema-goer, from Andhra Pradesh, had complained of chest pains during the film's climax, and fainted shortly afterwards. He was rushed to the nearby Old Government Hospital, where he died. Medics ordered his body to be sent to the Tiruvannamalai Government Medical College Hospital for post-mortem but, according to the *Times of India*, the cadaver, and the person charged with transporting it, both went missing.

The story fuelled a wave of supernatural panic on social media that accompanied the film's release. A video purporting to show a woman who "got possessed while watching *The Conjuring 2*" was viewed close to five million times since being uploaded to Facebook, with many viral news sites in Southeast Asia reporting the "possession" as fact. Another viral Facebook post, from Singaporean man Damian Ng Yih Leong, shows a "cross" on a hotel room mirror the man claimed to have found after watching *The Conjuring 2*, which he describes as "my first firsthand encounter with paranormal activity." *telegraph.co.uk, 18 June 2016.*

A man died after falling into a hot spring in Yellowstone National Park, having strayed some 200 metres (656ft) from a designated walkway. Colin Nathaniel Scott, 23, from Portland, Oregon, fell into boiling acidic water in the Norris Geyser Basin area of the park in north-west Wyoming on 7 June. He was with his sister Sable, who called for help, but he could not be saved. Springs in that part of the park, where boiling water runs under thin rock, can see temperatures of up to 93˚C (199˚F). "It's very fragile rock and can be thin as a skiff of ice," according to park spokeswoman Charissa Reid, who said rescue efforts were abandoned "due to the extreme nature and futility of it all." She added: "There were no remains left to recover." At least 22 people are known to have died from hot spring-related injuries in and around Yellowstone since 1890. Most of the deaths have been accidents, although at least two people had been trying to swim in a hot spring. *[AP] BBC News, 8 June; Times, Sun, 10 June 2016.*

A North Carolina waterpark closed after an 18-year-old girl was killed by a brain-eating amœba. Lauren Seitz was exposed to the amœba at the US National Whitewater Center (USNWC) when she was whitewater rafting and the raft overturned. "Initial test results found *Naegleria fowleri* DNA was present in the whitewater system," the USNWC said in a statement. This type of amœba is most frequently found in warm lakes, rivers and springs during the summer. It's harmless if swallowed, but can lead to fatal infection if it is forced up the nose. The amœba doesn't survive in saltwater. Should the amœba cause the infection, the disease can last up to nine days. Its symptoms may include headache, fever, vomiting, confusion, seizures, loss of balance and hallucination. Death follows in over 97 per cent of cases. Most such deaths in recent years happened in Texas and Louisiana, southern US states where waters are warmer. *Blacklistednews.com, 27 June 2016.*

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"Also I have three stories in three anthologies with other authors – we've raised almost **£2,000** for cancer charities."

George Stewart "I am delighted to tell everyone that the course is everything it says on the tin, excellent! I have wanted to write for years, and this course took me by the hand and helped me turn my scribblings into something much more professional. I am delighted that my **writing is being published and I am actually being paid.** All thanks to the Comprehensive Creative Writing course."

Katherine Kavanagh "I have been publishing my own website for circus critique. This work has led to recognition in my field, with work offers ranging from writing book reviews for scholarly journals to running master classes for young people. I have had two paid writing residencies at festivals this year and have been employed to write tweets. Payments total **£2575**, plus expenses for travel, tickets to events and payments in kind in the form of review copy books."

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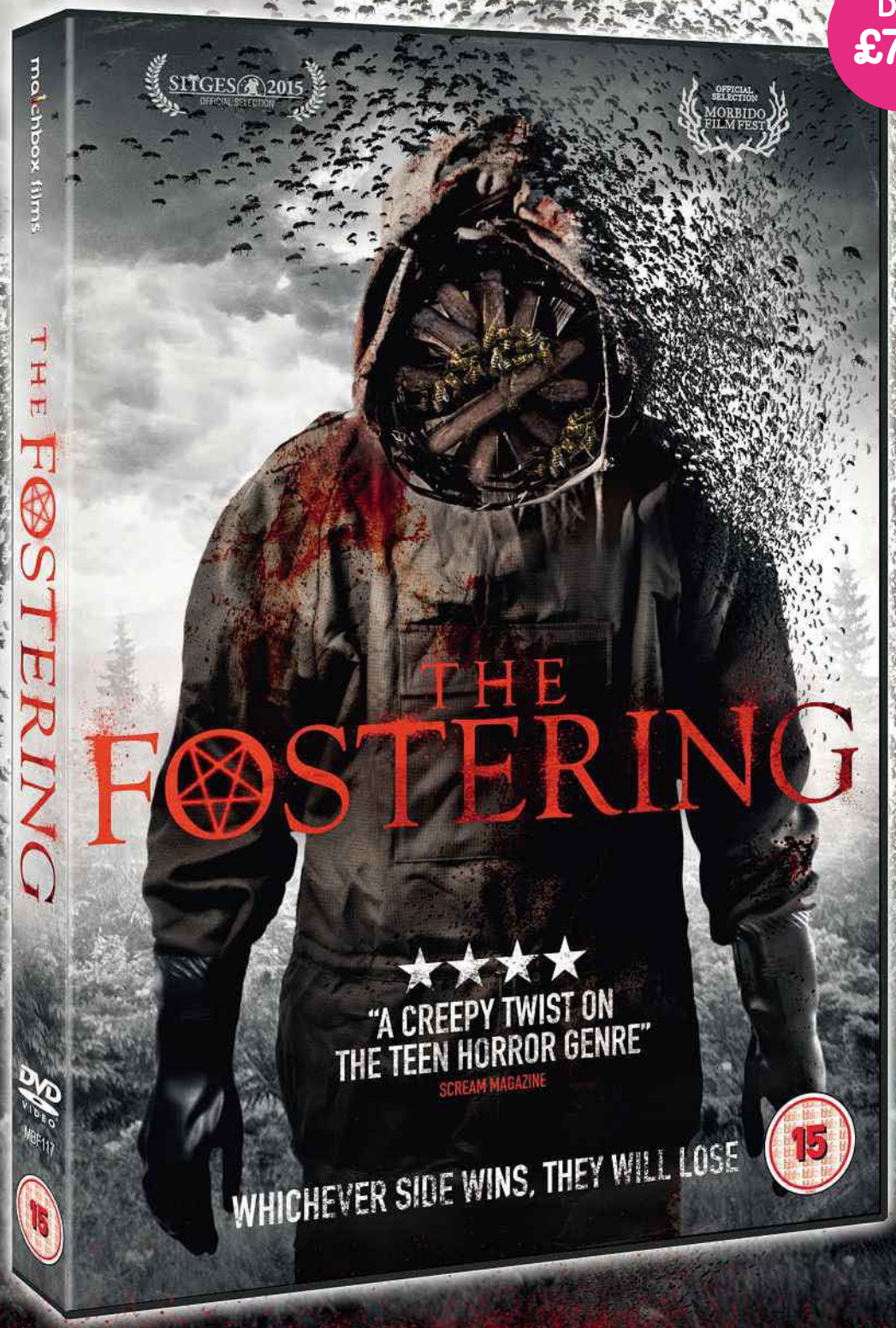

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